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THE

ROMANCE OF A DULL LIFE

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THE

ROMANCE OF A DULL LIFE

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"MORNING CLOUDS" AND "THE AFTERNOON OF LIFE"

"The book, if you would see anything in it, requires to be read in the clear, brown, twilight atmosphere in which it was written; if opened in the sunshine, it is apt to look exceedingly like a volume of blank pages"

N. HAWTHORNE

LONDON

LONGMAN, GREEN, LONGMAN, AND ROBERTS

1861

TO THOSE WHO KNOW

THE WEIGHT AND WORTH OF DULLNESS

THIS STORY IS DEDICATED

WITH SYMPATHY AND CONGRATULATION

THE ROMANCE OF A DULL LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

"Picciol seme in terra accolto
Non palesa o fiori, o fronde;
E pur tutta il seme asconde,
E la pianta, e il frutto e il fior."

METASTASIO.

IT is very doubtful whether the surprising degree of self-love which we find by experience to be common, is at all more than is necessary for the happiness of such an imperfect creature as man,—certainly it would depress the spirits of many excellent people, if they saw themselves, and those things that pertain to them, in the same aspect which they present to external observers.

Mr. Felton, for instance, was quite unconscious of his very uninteresting position at the time of which I am about to speak: a delicious time of year; one of the soft-winded days in March that seem to hurry forward the spring, and just at that time of day when it gives one a little heart-ache to be obliged to stay in-doors—the early part of afternoon.

But Mr. Felton kept in the dining-room fire, though

it looked dim and dusty when sunlight reached the scarcely moving flame; and he continued to sum up long columns of figures, and to rustle business-like papers, for an hour after his wife and daughter had left the luncheon table: and then, fully engrossed with the anxious calculations he was making, forgot to ring the bell for the removal of that intrusive meal—forgot to open the window and exchange the smell of luncheon for the sweet freshness of outer air: and drawing down the blind to prevent the fire being dazzled, sat down beside it to think for a few moments, with a tired brain,—forgot what he meant to think about, and fell fast asleep. To look at him then, while two or three drowsy flies staggered up and down the sunny window panes, or buzzed into the wine glasses, was not likely to awaken an interest in one of the most worthy men who ever toiled over intricate and disquieting accounts. His was a character of few salient features, but whatever other characteristics might be hidden by his quietness and reserve, solidity of mind and moderation of feeling were perceptible in his manner and appearance.

In some respects his nature had the advantages of a house with thick walls:—in company with people whose feelings were heated, his remained cool, and when a cold change passed over other hearts, his affections were as true and warm as they had ever been. He was a man who attracted respect, but not liking, from those who knew him slightly, and who, when known well enough to be liked, was greatly loved, but none the less revered. He had been twice married; his first wife left him at her death a little girl three years old. In her eighth year it was found necessary to transfer the clever child from the society of a nurse to

the discipline of a governess. A sensible, pleasing lady undertook the office, and though unable, with her own very commonplace mind, to take a fair measure of her pupil's, she discharged her main duties so much to Mr. Felton's satisfaction, that when his daughter had reached the age of fifteen, he married the kind Miss Beverly, whom Constance soon learned to call "mamma," and with little change of circumstances beyond losing the prerogative of making tea for her father during the holidays.

Constance was now twenty-two, and had a sister still in the nursery. Sitting by the drawing-room window on that pleasant afternoon, she read in Clarendon's History; a careful reading, it seemed, for maps were beside her and two other books of reference. The passage she read was: "This being the true present condition of his two kingdoms of England and Scotland, and it being necessary for his Majesty to give life to the afflicted state of his affairs by his own personal activity and vigour, he told them there remained only that he should impart to them the like state of his other kingdom of Ireland" (book 12). The thoughts that occupied her mind were, "Shall I go? I don't wish it very much; he made more point of it than he need, and seemed to take it for granted that I should like to come; he has no reason for thinking that; it would not make me unhappy if he did leave the county without meeting me again; it is a very pretty sight I dare say, but it seems to me that he thought I should come to see him more than the coursing,—it's a great way to go for seeing either; however, I suppose I must go."

The opening door recalled her attention to the historian's stately sentence, but it was again disturbed

by Mrs. Felton's coming in with a pile of new muslin curtains, which augured ill for any longer quiet.

"My dear, I want to know about to-morrow: do you particularly care for this coursing match? I should be very sorry to disappoint you; but the truth is, your father has still so much to do in preparing the accounts for your uncle's inspection, that he fears he cannot spare time for driving you, and Dennis will have his hands quite full till they come."

"Oh, then I will not think of going, mamma,—it does not matter; I should like to go certainly. What can he have to do though? servants do make such difficulties about nothing!"

"You are unreasonable, Conny: there are many things to be done before visitors arrive; the dining-room tables must be rubbed for an hour to-day and to-morrow, and all the furniture too; and I shall want him upstairs with the curtain-hanging. Indeed, my dear, I shall feel quite relieved (if you really do not mind) if you will just go and tell Emma that Dennis may help her clean the windows now, and finish his work on the lawn to-morrow morning; stay, I will go myself, for I see you are busy."

With rather a blank feeling, Constance watched the transmission of this order. Idly observing trivial things as the eye often does when the heart is most busy, she watched the maid's trim figure tripping lightly down the gravel walk, till she came to a bed of American plants where Dennis and the gardener were at work; she noticed the flying pink strings of a cap that seemed to smirk behind and before; the merry alacrity of the fellow-servant, and stolid movements of the other man, looking up and slowly pressing down his spade, while evidently some gallant raillery was passing between them.

The sound of their voices came pleasantly through the soft rushing of south wind; and distance, mellowing all roughness of tone, spared its gaiety: — they seemed, in their simple, unrestrained mirth, to be more in harmony with the season, the wren's quick song, and the polyanthus blossoms, than the indoors observer felt herself; she thought, too, that Emma liked Dennis.

"Constance," said Mrs. Felton, settling herself again to her work, "did you not think that Mr. Ord, whom we met yesterday, strikingly handsome?"

"Very, but not pleasing."

"Nothing much amiss, I thought, and so gentlemanly. Those Miss Simpsons are so like each other, that I really did not know which was which: the one sitting by Miss Hyde after dinner is the prettiest, and I fancied Miss Hyde thought her nephew thought so; she watched them so closely at the piano — didn't you notice it?"

"Notice what, mamma? I beg your pardon" (Clarendon had proved more attractive than Mrs. Felton's past impressions).

"Oh! my dear, don't let me interrupt your reading: I was only speaking of Mr. Hyde. What a singular man he looks! I think I never saw such eccentric dressing for a dinner party."

"Was it? I really did not observe that."

"Not his coat! and he was talking to you nearly the whole of the evening."

"I never do look at coats, dear mamma," said Constance, shutting her book with a smile; "but I think you may excuse poor Mr. Hyde, whatever he wore, for *he* was not expected when they asked us to meet his aunt, and came suddenly, not knowing there were any

besides ourselves invited to dinner. I hope you like Miss Hyde; I think she is so charming."

As she spoke, Emma came in, saying, "If you please 'um, shall Dennis put down the carpet upstairs now he's come away from the garden?"

"Yes, he had better do so. I will come up and give him directions about it."

And Constance was again alone, musing upon a question that often occupied her mind — "Is it necessary, when people come to stay in your house, to be in a constant fuss for two or three days before?" "I suppose," she thought, "it is when one is not rich, and with plenty of servants; but I cannot see that all this disturbance is worth while; perhaps if I remembered my uncle enough to love him, I should think so, but this party of people whom we know hardly anything about! — however, I certainly care enough about them to wish I was not in this winter dress still."

The Feltons were not rich; in general estimation they were poor, though their expenditure was of that sort which a little overpays everybody for everything; thus, with a limited income, disabling them from indulging in any needless expense.

The father of Constance was the eldest of three brothers; the family residence was left to him, with an adjoining estate that might have made him a wealthy man, had it not been heavily encumbered with debts, which old Mr. Felton had contracted by engaging in ruinous speculations. Still, with the greatest prudence and economy, and by letting his land on small leases, John Felton was able to live in the old home — to live, but not in the style which the place seemed to deserve.

To get on at all, he found it necessary to resist the many social demands proportioned to a county family;

and with a very small establishment to content himself with comparative seclusion: he did this upon principle when he was first married, from preference as the years went on: those who resolutely withdraw from society, soon learn to feel as if society neglected them, and with growing alienation shrink from any effort to retain a position among its prosperous members; what cannot be enjoyed is soon disliked and at last dreaded.

It was thus with the owner of Ashenholt. Mrs. Felton regretted it, liking society in theory, though shy in practice. Constance suffered, as all young persons must, but did not know that the loneliness she loved was the cause of her frequent dejections; and while sometimes longing for a few friendly companions of her own age, never wished for admission to gayer visiting circles; the little glimpse she had of them was too alarming.

Many ill consequences resulted from this kind of life: used from her childhood to the check of needful economy, she unconsciously attached the idea of worldliness to any one who appeared handsomely dressed and happily regardless of expense. Mrs. Felton often laughed at this childish prejudice; but at the same time neither she nor her husband felt warranted in asking Mr. and Mrs. Grant (new comers, who lived two miles off) to a quiet dinner, from the vague fear, often lurking in the mind of recluse householders, that "such people must enter into society more than we do — it won't do to ask them to dine here in our quiet way — they would be bored, and not like our simple habits."

It happened, as it often does, that while the Feltons said this, with a sigh for something of sociable intercourse, over their mutton broth and cold meat dinner, Mr. and Mrs. Grant were remarking, "Certainly this is a most

chilling set of people about us! — not a creature with any cordial hospitality to whom one could go for a little talk and a cup of tea — the Feltons live near enough, but they seem too stiff and proud for that sort of thing. I suppose, in their style of house, they would not like to do things in our humble fashion; if we ever have to ask them here, it must be to tea — people do not expect so much then. My dear, I do not think you need put more coal on the fire: we are not coming back here after luncheon to-day."

The Wratislaws, five miles off, had been kept at bay for some ten years by this imagined *exigéance* as to expensive entertainments; Mr. Felton refusing all invitations, and only now and then discharging the irksome duty of a morning call. Accident, however, revealed Mr. Wratislaw as a good-hearted sensible man, and not the finical, critical, and therefore formidable possessor of a fine estate and large income, which the Feltons chose to take for granted. He happened to have a valuable workman from the village to which they belonged, who had a very bad fall from the roof of his house — the leg was broken, and Mr. Wratislaw spared no pains in showing every kindness to the poor man; finding that he would be crippled for life, he came to consult Mr. Felton as to the best way of securing him annual relief, and in conversation about this, they found each other out: the icy crust broke, there were heartier leave-takings — calls quickly returned, — interchange of books and plants — and wonder in both families that they did not know before what nice neighbours they had.

CHAP. II.

"Peut-être que pour vous c'est un monde inconnu,
Vous ne m'en croyez pas; mais d'honneur je l'ai vu."
COLIN D'HARVILLE.

THE uncle expected at Ashenholt was a rather redoubtable man, very keen, very well versed in worldly wisdom, and much addicted to smile at his brother's opposite habits of mind: he had ridiculed his persistence in keeping the family mansion, with the grounds belonging to it,—it would have sold well and enabled him to live in better style elsewhere: he thought the idea of his second marriage to a woman of no family, inconceivably absurd, till it happened. But what provoked him most of all was his brother's partial adoption of two orphans, the children of his first wife's brother, who were left almost penniless when Constance was sixteen, and money very desirable for her future advantage.

It would have been vain to tell Robert Felton that this was done with a scriptural view of future advantages, for which John Felton believed he had, at least, as strong a promise as any the world could give,—so no motive or reason was alleged, but both the young people were sent to good schools,—Charles to prepare for the navy; Harriet, the eldest of the two, still only fifteen, to be fitted for her destined occupation as a governess: in the holidays they were to make Ashenholt their home. Mr. Felton stipulated that they should do this,

though he divided the expense of their education with a distant relation of the first Mrs. Felton,—a Sir William Eddowes, who was quite satisfied with an occasional inquiry as to their welfare, and an invitation, seldom accepted, for a week's visit at his place near London.

To Constance their vacations had been times of much enjoyment, though any natures more unlike than hers and Harriet Payne's could hardly be found.

As to Robert Felton's own conduct in life, it had been in perfect keeping with his shrewd maxims. He went abroad early in life, and, without much capital, made a large fortune by successful ventures in trade: having done this, he married the Honourable Mrs. Page, a widow with good property, whose two daughters were just about to be introduced. He then began to say as little as he could of the way in which he became rich, and as much as he could of the fashionable circle in which he now moved. To the weaker mind of his wife, his firmness, his shrewdness, and even his caustic temper, were a support; and he liked the taste (though it was her *only* taste) of a person who had always been accustomed to society of a rather more distinguished caste than that to which he was born: so far they were admirably suited to each other. He *was* redoubtable to sensitive natures; and this visit, which was to introduce his wife and her daughters to his relations, had more than politeness for its object,—he came upon business. For this business Mr. Felton was preparing a summary of his accounts, wishing to consult his brother upon some financial measures which he knew Robert could judge of far better than he could himself: on such points he valued his brother's advice, and on others he neither invited it nor received it when given.

The result of this thorough examination into ways

and means was not very encouraging: there had been considerable repairs during the past year in one part of the house, and there was less available money in hand, for the income tax had been lately imposed. It was clear that so far from relaxing the curb upon household expenses, John Felton would be obliged to economise as much as ever.

The day before the visitors arrived he called his wife to look at the upshot of his calculations, and, after explaining the different statements, cheerfully announced that they must, if possible, make new retrenchments,—adding kindly, "No one could manage better than you do, my dear, but we might, perhaps, persuade Burder to be a little less wasteful: why she need keep up such great fires all day in the kitchen, I don't know."

"My dear John, you must take into account——"

"Well, well, you know best about all that, but it was only last month that you complained of the butcher's bill being so much above the mark."

Constance was happily ignorant of the tenor of this conversation, until she came in from the garden with her hands full of daffodils for the flower-vase. While she was arranging them, before luncheon, Mrs. Felton found time to impress her with a vague sense of impoverishment:—she did not mean to do so, but being herself a little staggered and very much disappointed, she gave vent to her feelings, without considering that in the mind of Constance every fear was exaggerated by her ignorance of precise facts; the facts justifying prudence, but not any serious anxiety. Owing to her father's habitual reserve, she was used to such entire uncertainty about his resources, that she fluctuated between the suspicion that they were extremely poor, and a belief that they were really as well off as most

people in their station. Their habits of expenditure having the inconsistency usual in the transactions of secluded people, she was often puzzled about this; and the mention of an occasional dinner party sometimes affected her imagination with the sort of panic that one might feel on hearing of a hunter being bought by a friend notoriously "impecunious."

At luncheon time she was a little reassured by her father's tranquil manner; he was more cheerful than usual, and talked more than he was wont. Mrs. Felton very noticeably shook the crumbs from a piece of dry bread as she ate it, with a good deal of *recueillement*, without any butter or preserve; and her "No wine for me, thank you," was equally symptomatic. These little varieties of conduct were not, however, more than the almost involuntary dramatic accompaniments of any strong feeling: she did not intend from that day forward to abstain from butter, cake, and wine; but she wished to express the feeling that it was time she should. Poor Mrs. Felton! with the most amiable motives she certainly did not exercise a soothing influence during the next forty-eight hours. She had much to annoy her,—a young girl who came for Emma's benefit to assist, broke several things to throw off with, and made a most vexatious noise at most of the doors, not being used to the locks, and, by a curious fatality, turning them all the wrong way; and the servants, seldom put out of their quiet routine by visitors, made as many difficulties as they could, by way of protest against a gentleman and three ladies coming all at once,—with their maid too.

"Only for a week, though," said Mrs. Felton, addressing Constance, but meaning to soothe the cook, who was retiring with a dogged face, after an unusually

sharp aspiration of the *h* when asking "What horders for the butcher to-day, mum, with all the company coming?"

Constance kept at her mother's side all the morning of the next day, with a dutiful wish to help, though nothing imaginable remained for her to help in; she had arranged the flower glasses and put on fresh couvrettes to the cushions; and she yielded so much to the spirit of the time as to get up and smooth and rearrange them now and then, if any one whisked by hastily, or a draught of wind fluttered them to one side. To employ herself in any private occupation was out of the question; not only a dereliction of duty in the eyes of her mother, but scarcely possible downstairs; for fussiness is a kind of moral ferment which spreads and agitates all who are within reach. (The master of the house knew this well, and had taken his newspaper and shut himself up in his study ever since breakfast.)

Tired of idling about under the semblance of being wanted, Constance felt a strong impulse to go to her room from time to time and read a few moments in peace; she did thus snatch a few pages of a rather difficult essay of Foster's; but against her conscience, (while Mrs. Felton was plucking about the bed-hangings in the best room with her head on one side)—it refreshed her to do so, and enabled her to go afterwards with more spirit than she otherwise could into the probable origin of a discoloured spot on the sofa-cushion. She was saying with sagacious deliberation, "It *may* be a coffee stain, mamma. I don't *think* the cat ever gets up there with dirty paws," when the door-bell rang.

Mrs. Robert Felton and her two daughters were in the room before Constance had made up her mind how she ought to address these cousins by marriage. "Miss

Page will never do," she thought, "still less Selina and Adelaide all at once." Nothing could be more gracefully affectionate than the new aunt; more inexpressive and polite than the cousins, who were left on the hands of Constance as soon as introductions were over; the two brothers who had joined the group were animated with real pleasure at the meeting; many years having passed without one. Their hearty cheery voices gave Constance some help in the effort of conversation; she was so shy, and her cousins so silent, that it *was* an effort.

She saw at the first glance that she should get on best with Adelaide, the youngest,—a lively expression of face, pretty features, and a good-natured tone of voice at once attracted her. Selina only looked well-dressed and inert, and the little that could be heard of her voice was rather gruff. She was, in truth, dull and heavy by nature; but her stupidity was too well-bred to make itself disagreeable: it was carefully masked by an air of studied *nonchalance*, and seldom led to any positive blunders.

People sometimes wonder that we talk so much about weather in England; the wonder is that those who are entire strangers can at first find anything better to talk of. When Constance had informed herself of Adelaide's feelings about dogs, riding, and spring weather, she found herself going over the same ground affirmatively: she was *so* fond of dogs—she could not ride well—wished she could—and these lovely spring days;—but there a happy change of thought occurred; her cousins had passed the last spring at Rome, and with a sudden turn of sentence she transferred to Adelaide the main stream of conversation, and listened with pleasure to her Italian experience, until a

move was made for bonnets being taken off upstairs. As her mother followed Mrs. Robert Felton out of the room, she caught the words, "Ah! indeed, my dear Mrs. Felton, the lot has fallen to you in a pleasant portion!"

The day passed, but it seemed a very long one. The party had not among them the elements of pleasant conversation. Mrs. Robert Felton talked much, but very irrelevantly; a curious compound of worldly interests and religious phraseology formed the staple of her communications, and these her husband frequently cut short with smooth irony, or a dogmatic contradiction; but what made Constance most uncomfortable was his manner of questioning her on all sorts of subjects, of which she knew little and cared less. Questions which she thought only visitors with no individual interest in a place could care about: such, for instance, as the height of the church tower; the acre-age of an adjoining field; the ownership of a slip of land some nine miles distant. Why ask her only to expose her ignorance? how tiresome that her father had fallen asleep that evening, and her mother got into that endless story with her aunt on the sofa!

Mr. Felton *had* committed this rudeness; he had been listening nearly an hour to his brother's account of the races he had witnessed last summer; his eyes, turned with rigid attention to his guest, as he spoke of one exploit after another, began to close, while still his voice did duty. "Indeed!" — "did they really?" — "how curious!"—"dear me!"—"and that was not the horse that won, you say?" He was very sleepy, poor man, and while the narrator turned to put down a cup of tea, he became quite unconscious of the weariness of that weary evening.

So Constance had to meet her uncle's fire of questions, and, unable to give the information he sought, she often spoke at random with nervous haste and overmuch emphasis upon matters utterly trifling, and upon themes where common decorum would have given seriousness to her manner, in a tone made trifling by distractions of thought from *mauvaise honte*, and anxiety under the cold light of an almost contemptuous eye. We all know how it is when an unskilful hand is blundering on the piano, how the wrong notes get the *staccato* of nervousness, or the heavy pressure of a finger for that time, at least, sure that it has reached the right chords. It sounds very ill, and so did the attempt of Constance to converse with a man whom the world had made arrogant, and nature extremely hard to please.

"John's a queer old fellow," he thought, as he went up to his room that night.

"Rather a peculiar family, is it not, dear Robert?" said his wife, with a demonstrative yawn.

"What a fool that woman is!" ejaculated Mr. Felton on entering his dressing-room a few minutes later; he spoke with such vehemence, that his wife caught part of the sentence, and called out eagerly:

"*Who's* a fool, John?"

"Robert, for marrying such a goose," was the reply, in a tone that shut up the subject.

CHAP. III.

"Tout ce qui rompt l'habitude ou la facilité de se rencontrer rend les hommes ennemis."—X. DE MAISTRE.

THE arrival of their guests had been looked forward to by Constance with some pleasure, for she was still at an age when any visitor seems likely to be a bringer of good things, inasmuch as new ideas, new appearances, must come with new people: when ten or twenty years have given us time to explore the novelty of average visitors, this feeling is changed for one less glad but more kindly. We have welcome in our hearts for real friends, and an almost inexhaustible patience of politeness for the rest.

Constance awoke the next morning expecting happiness in spite of the difficulties of the preceding day. Everything out of doors seemed to expect it too. The large wych elm fronting the hall windows was already studded thick with the brown blossom that makes such a rich fretwork against clear skies in morning and evening twilight; on the hillside the dun woods were just beginning to stir from winter dreaming; for the palm blossom broke out here and there in dusky green patches, and the road that led towards them had that pleasant inviting look which makes distant objects seem so accessible, and on either side of its cleanly brightness the hedges looked only waiting for rain to burst into tender leaf.

With her constitutional love of flowers Constance assured herself that a walk to that woody steep—where primroses and violets abounded, and a hardy cowslip might have opened—would be sufficient enjoyment for the most fastidious guest. At the same time she ran into the nursery to ask if little Mary might go with them, if they went out walking early in the day; the child would be a relief if Selina was as inflexibly pompous as she had been yesterday. But when the walk was proposed, Selina "seldom walked," and declined going. Adelaide was "charmed to go, delighted in spring flowers" (though scarcely knowing a dandelion from a marsh-marigold), and kept up such a lively chatter during the walk that Constance found no opportunity for showing her their prettiest views, and could not always answer Mary's childish questions without interrupting her cousin in a recital of self-interesting adventures. At first Constance was amused by listening, but before they got home she was quite tired of hearing what balls Adelaide had attended, who danced with her, what she had heard about the gentleman who danced with her so often at the race-ball, &c. "How frivolous!" Constance thought, and yet she felt a liking for her; she had an affectionate manner towards Constance already, and it was agreeable to be treated caressingly by any one so elegant and stylish. Though two years younger than herself, Constance instinctively fell into the way of deferring to her opinion; but then Adelaide's manner claimed deference both by its confidence and critical vivacity.

If Pascal could say of something worn, "Cet habit, c'est une force," much more may be affirmed of a manner which bespeaks a perfect knowledge of all that is *comme il faut* in social relations.

Constance was utterly deficient in stylishness, whatever that mysterious attribute is,—no analysis has yet explained its real nature; no bodily advantages, no use of wealth, or attention to fashion will secure it,—whether it is the result of always adopting every good fashion in time (which many women of refined taste refuse to do, and, continuing to wear what *was* the thing, either on account of its beauty or convenience, seem always in the rear of fashion), or whether it is the effect of a more subtle agency, of confidence in one's appearance as well as in everything else belonging to self, which acts like magic for producing the approbation of most people and a certain sense of inferiority in quiet lookers-on,—Constance wanted style, and felt she wanted it, and wondered why whatever *she* put on always had such a dejected, incongruous look, while other people who took half the pains, with less delicacy of taste, achieved so much better an appearance. Adelaide seemed to have noticed the same thing, for just as they were coming indoors she glanced at her cousin's bonnet, and asked if they had a nice milliner near them; country places were often so inconvenient for that sort of thing.

"I believe the one we employ for our best things is a very fair one," replied Constance; "but perhaps you are thinking of the bonnet I have on; we cannot afford to have everything done from home. Mamma put on the ribbon of mine; is it anything very odd?"

"Why no—rather, nothing to signify; you know I am just fresh from Paris, which spoils one for English dress. But how I wish you would let our maid trim your spring bonnet!—you must have one soon, of course?"

"I'm much obliged to you for thinking of it, but I don't want to trouble your maid. We must make haste

to take our bonnets off, whatever they are—there is one o'clock striking."

A little vexed, a little nettled, and much tired, Constance went down to luncheon. The gentlemen were still occupied with business in the study; it was so engrossing that they did not wish to go out much before dinner, and Mrs. Felton, having other designs for Dennis, said nothing about a drive. When a little stroll was under consideration as the best pastime, rain crept softly down and forbade it; so a long afternoon of working and talking was inevitable. Poor Mrs. Robert Felton had already swallowed many a rising yawn, and turned over the leaves of several "furniture books" on the table; some of them dated from Mr. Felton's first wedding-day.

Little Mary was sent for after her dinner, the "sweet child" having been pressingly demanded; but unused to being a show child, she gravely stared at the stranger aunt for a few moments, and then, seizing up the cat with the wrong end uppermost, ensconced herself at the farther corner of the room, well out of sight. Her mother wished her out of hearing too, for her guest went on saying silly things about children; and the anecdotes of pious infants, and the sayings of those who had prayed that their parents might be holier, though entirely beyond Mary's comprehension, were calculated to lodge in her retentive memory several most undesirable impressions; as to diverting the course of conversation, when Mrs. Robert Felton was in one of her paroxysms of prattle, that was almost impossible.

Selina might be asleep or awake: in the curtained recess where she sat it was not known how this drizzling afternoon affected her. Adelaide worked languidly, looking up ever and anon towards the drive in the hope

of promiscuous visitors. "Do you not have callers sometimes?" she asked.

"Rarely," said Mrs. Felton, "and in such rain as this no one would care to come out."

Constance heard the question with some impatience, for Adelaide knew not a creature in their neighbourhood; but it was a natural wish for a pretty person without much interest in passing events, and everything in her exterior likely to attract those who saw her for the first time.

A few minutes later the gate of the drive swung back, and some one rode in.

"Mr. Hyde!" exclaimed Mrs. Felton.

"Surely you mistook, dear Mamma; he was to leave the country the day after that coursing match."

But it was Basil Hyde who was then shown in, making, as he entered, some apology for introducing the smell of a wet coat. He had stayed in the country a few days longer than he at first proposed doing, and thought he would call at Ashenholt to-day when the weather made it unlikely that he should be disappointed of finding them at home. Taking a chair near Constance, he said that both he and his aunt had been sorry not to see them the other day, when the weather was beautiful for coursing; he had made sure that they should. But before Constance could reply, Mrs. Robert Felton struck in with a lamentation upon the depravity of the human heart which made people delight in hunting harmless animals, forgetful of the spiritual adversary who was pursuing them with far more subtlety and power; a remark that involved Mr. Hyde in a playful defence of his favourite amusement, and gave Constance time to notice the peculiar depth of his musical voice, and the skill with which he could turn the stream of conver-

sation from the rapids of folly to a channel of general interest.

He stayed some little time, waiting, as Mrs. Felton supposed, for her husband to appear, though insisting upon his not being told that he was there. "Pray do not disturb him, Mrs. Felton. I know too well the savage mood of a man drawn from his study to make a courteous demonstration in the drawing-room. I hope I may have another opportunity of seeing him. What a pretty place you have here! I had never come within three miles of it before, and was charmed with the wooded valley I turned towards, after passing the bridge."

"Then you do not join Miss Hyde in London, as she hoped?" asked Constance, referring to the first part of his sentence.

"No, I think not, at least not just yet. My aunt would have desired her very kind remembrances if she had known I should see you. May I ask if you think of going to the Podmores again before long? you know I always feel indebted to them for introduction."

"Mrs. Podmore has asked me, but as I was there so lately, I am not going for some time—I should think," replied Constance, glancing towards Mrs. Felton.

"Well, it will not be for want of pressing, I am sure. You see old Podmore has a godfather's hold upon me, so I *must;* but if I wait till the autumn, I hope to combine hunting with Hottentots."

At this allusion to Mr. Podmore's fixed idea of converting the Hottentots, they both laughed; and Mary—who had crept up to her sister's knee, and, leaning on it, watched Mr. Hyde's face with shy, round-eyed curiosity,—broke out into a merry laugh too, without knowing why, and then took courage and gave him the kiss he

asked for, and took the shoulder perch which is so attractive to a little child when the gentleman is tall and his face good-natured.

After the lively visitor had left, every one seemed to find conversation easier than it had been an hour ago. Mrs. Robert Felton wished to know who he was, where he came from, and the like; on hearing that he was of no profession, but lived with the aunt who had brought him up, on a good private fortune, she observed, "And a fine-looking man too! I hope he is duly sensible of such abounding mercies."

"Who are the Podmores, Constance?" asked Adelaide.

"Mrs. Podmore is the daughter of the lady with whom my dear mother was at school; she remembers her well, for she was at school with her, and so she has always been very kind to me. She lives about forty miles from us."

"Is she nice?"

"I don't know quite how to answer," said Constance, with a dubious smile; "I ought to think her so, perhaps, but she is not very easy to live with. Mr. Podmore is extremely good; he gives all his thoughts almost to missionary work."

The ladies of the party had thus satisfied their curiosity; but at dinner-time, on hearing Mrs. Felton speak with some emphasis of Mr. Hyde's politeness in calling, and Miss Hyde's agreeable manners, Robert Felton turned to his brother with the natural question, "Who *are* these Hydes, John?"

"Why, Miss Hyde was a school-fellow of poor Elizabeth's, and a great friend too in early days; she thinks my girl here very like her. A favourite nephew lives with her, and whatever interests the aunt he makes his

concern too; and so it seems he called to-day to see how we go on here."

"Yes," Mrs. Felton chimed in, "and he appeared quite struck with the place, he thought it so well situated."

"Ay," said her husband, "a little thing strikes one in a morning call."

"Rather a distinguished-looking man," observed Mrs. Robert Felton.

"Remarkably so," replied the sister-in-law, "and I will tell you, my dear, whom he reminds me of: don't you remember that handsome ostler we noticed at the Star the other day?—excepting his moustache, I should say that Mr. Hyde was very like him."

Constance was about to dispute this point, but a look of studied inattention from her father brought to mind that it was not interesting for their much travelled guests to hear how far a chance caller resembled an ostler at a neighbouring inn; and she adroitly turned the subject.

CHAP. IV.

"Unrelated men give little joy to each other, will never suspect the latent powers of each. We talk sometimes of a great talent for conversation, as if it were a permanent property in some individuals. Conversation is an evanescent relation—no more. A man is reputed to have thought and eloquence; he cannot, for all that, say a word to his cousin or his uncle. They accuse his silence with as much reason as they would blame the insignificance of a dial in the shade. In the sun it will mark the hour. Among those who enjoy his thought he will regain his tongue."—EMERSON.

SELINA came down the next morning with her salts-bottle in prominent use. The ostensible cause a headache, the fact signified to her father and mother and sister, that she was being bored to an unwholesome degree.

Mrs. Robert Felton chattered less; there was a dry good sense and quiet good feeling about her hostess that a little banked up her fulness of religious small-talk.

Adelaide and Constance got on together best, but not very well. The mere presence of a decidedly alien mind seems to a sensitive person to burden every minute with constraint and torpor: nothing of opposing tendency may be done or said, but antagonism is felt and afflicts.

Trying with all her might to keep up conversation, Constance found that her spasmodic efforts occasionally flung her to great distances from the topics last dis-

cussed. Thus, when, five minutes before, she had been mentioning a terrible fire in their neighbourhood, she found herself next inquiring what library her uncle subscribed to in London; and then, whether the Italian women were as handsome as travellers say: this seemed incoherent enough, but there was one leading idea among all these aberrations of thought,—"What *can* I say that these irksome people will care to talk about?" She overheard herself that day using all sorts of superlative terms; everything was so excessively expressed; she was "so astonished" at something a little uncommon, "so delighted" at things barely pleasant, "so grieved" at whatever did not happen quite smoothly,—symptoms unusual in her manner: the only real feeling that would then have matched her exaggerated phrase was *gêne* and anxiety to pass through the day's duties of entertainment with as little of failure and confusion as a temperament like hers could feel.

We talk so simply of people going to stay with each other, and it is apparently taken for granted that to bring *persons* near is the main object: it is far otherwise;—when eyes and mouths are side by side, the unlessened distance of natures is more deeply felt, and in exhibition far more painful than it could ever be in imagination.

Constance felt it to-day with emotions little short of agony: all her dear old home accompaniments—things that had ever before seemed good enough for their use,—now turned against her peace, and distressed her by their shabby looks and unfitness for these new housemates,—these surprised children of luxury. She felt also so acutely every little flaw of manner arising from the independent habits of secluded life, and rendered now so striking by contrast, from the ease with which

nature, whether bad or good, gains *there* ascendency over social or diplomatic art. She suffered as those must suffer who can overlook and analyse the blunders and habitual delusions that prevail around them.

Perhaps she offended against good taste more in consequence of this clear perception of what was amiss, than she could in a more unconscious state of eccentricity; seeing almost everything from two opposite points of view, her own and that of their guests, she could neither act simply nor speak conventionally. Thus, while assenting to some kindly meant compliment about the quiet of their lives, which Adelaide hazarded on seeing her at fault upon some little point of social usage, Constance, after a "Yes, it is very pleasant," added, with awkward stiffness, "But any one else would be moped here, and it makes us rather stupid,"—and could not avoid reading in her cousin's face that she thought they had as little escaped being moped as being *very* stupid; for it is undeniable that people who live fast and free in the exciting movement of modern society—whose thoughts are accelerated by prompt acts, and whose works and words are condensed by pressure of intellectual equality—whose conversation is full of facts, and animated by the constant necessity of being amusing—find, when first launched on the tardy stream of home life in narrow circumstances, a most depressing paucity of interests, a feebleness of tone and fulness of detail that astonishes, a play of individual peculiarities that displeases, and a lack of buoyancy that excites pity, while it inclines them at the same time to censure apparent sloth,—*apparent* only in very many cases; for *their* presence has brought a great check upon the more flowing tendencies of secluded minds; it has palsied the confidence of thinkers (for how are theory and

sentiment abashed before practical strength!), it has suspended usual occupations, and elicited much ill-directed vivacity.

For example, poor Mrs. Felton took so much pains to give her guests an accurate account of the flood in Ash Meadows the winter before last. Both Mr. and Mrs. Robert Felton had apprehended the catastrophe, and had said "How very sad!" once or twice, some minutes before she allowed the waters to have reached their highest pass; and with what a wearied courtesy had her listeners to prolong the symptoms of compassionate attention!

She was not felicitous in conversation, though very well-intentioned, often saying a most uninteresting thing with an air so *empressé* or important, that the little blunder became too prominent to escape even her own notice, and then nervousness grew to embarrassment, and words poured out at random, in hopes, as it seemed, of the right one turning up. Again, with an obscure sense that visitors are usually entertained by having things shown to them, Constance remarked that she and her mother were unfortunately prone to make a disproportionate fuss about little show trifles as common elsewhere as blackberries, and only new or remarkable to themselves.

"Oh! I must fetch that papier-mâché bookstand of mine to show you," said Mrs. Felton to her sister-in-law; "you like pretty things:" and it was brought down, but on the silver paper being removed, nothing was displayed on which the visitor *could* comment as a novelty, and all she could observe was, "Yes, a very pretty thing indeed, it is such a nice manufacture; they make beautiful things of this sort now—the bazaars are full of them."

A young calf, first turned out, does not make stranger miscalculations of distance and force than does a nervous mind of mental distances and powers when first brought into close proximity with a world-polished nature;—this, probably smoothed down by continuous excitement, has a poise and calmness which seems to promote all the exaggerating tendencies of the other.

Mr. Felton did not suffer from too much excitement at this time; his mind was occupied by graver concerns than what was thought of him or his by any number of people. He was *gêné*, notwithstanding, in the intervals of business, but his nerves hardly admitted of his agitation being shown; if they were affected, it was with sullenness, or a silence that much resembled it. Constance wished earnestly that he would forbear taking up the newspaper at tea-time, and reading ten minutes at a time utterly regardless of those about him, or at least avoid throwing down all the fire-irons with the energy of his attack upon a deadening fire; for she had seen her aunt start under the latter process, and her uncle's contemptuous lip curl when the well-read paper was reverted to again and again.

Probably it is only among thoughtful and refined solitaries that the shame of odd manners is felt; for books have taught them that the world is severe upon eccentricity, without teaching them how they are to avoid it, or how to escape the stinging chagrin it may occasion.

Was there nothing then in the wealth of minds like Mr. Felton's and his daughter's calculated to interest their guests? No, for they could not appreciate it. The world having rubbed off all traces of originality in themselves, left no taste for it in the *manière d'être* of other people. Mr. Felton was in all respects deserving

of that hard-worked term, "a superior man," but he was unfortunately so far superior to the common instincts of vanity, that the wish to please seldom influenced his manner: to do good, to give comfort and safe counsel whenever they were wanted, was his ambition; but he forgot the necessities of the dull hours when more susceptible natures may suffer acutely from vanity or extreme fastidiousness.

Constance was what people call an interesting person. There was in her character that mixture of what is pleasing and what is puzzling that is generally thus described; and yet she did not interest to the degree that might be expected at first sight, because she so easily adapted herself to the characters with which she had to do, that her own was lost sight of. Her manner in society was too conditional—conditional on the degree to which her sensitive nerves were shaken, or her diffident vanity soothed; and thus she could never have in society the weight that her talents might have claimed.

All through the week of her uncle's visit she was fluctuating between the desire and the effort to attach herself to these uncongenial cousins, and an instinct which prompted her to stand aloof from natures so diverse and unintelligible. It was her first experience of phenomena by no means uncommon. She heard religious feelings expressed by her frivolous aunt with almost as little reserve as her friends, the Podmores, exercised; she found herself challenged to give full testimony to "gracious dealings" with her soul, in a tone that really startled her. Brought up herself by those whose lives were governed by a sound and lively faith, and quite unused to talk glibly and frequently upon themes which claim profound reverence, she was

exceedingly puzzled how to reply when her aunt probed her, with affectionate zeal, for expressions of confident security.

"I entirely believe all you do," she would sometimes answer, "but I dare not speak with such assurance of my soul's state. I am trying—indeed I *do* try—to feel this perfect love and unwavering hope, but I still do my duty so imperfectly that I often fear lest I make too sure of victory."

It is needless to give the argument at length. Constance was perplexed by it; for, from a natural deficiency of good sense, Mrs. Robert Felton only succeeded in giving the erroneous impression that she thought faith with works desirable, but without works considerably better.* The evident weakness of the aunt's mind was, however, an antidote to her doctrine; and what rendered it still more null and void in her niece's judgment, was the great inconsistency of her conversation on other matters, its glaring worldliness, and the frivolity allowed, though noisily lamented, in Adelaide's choice of amusement. She permitted her to attend balls with her step-father, but groaned over them and never consented to anything of a dance at home. When speaking of this one evening at Ashenholt, she declared that she

* It is greatly to be desired that so false an impression of Christian belief was only deducible from the eager and hasty words of those who combat an opposite form of error; unfortunately it is transmitted, in papers printed for distribution, to the minds of ignorant people. I have now in my hand a paper entitled "Salvation," which contains the following unguarded expressions: "The only qualification a man has for being saved is his being a sinner. . . . Dear reader, take your place as a thoroughly bad, good-for-nothing sinner, and then may you look up in the face of the Son of God, and say, 'Saviour, Thou art mine, *for* I am a sinner.'" One shudders to imagine the terrible consequences of such teaching as this among people of unbridled passions and grossly ignorant minds.

should be sorry to enter so fully into the customs of the world as to give dancing parties in their house; and her husband, ready to vent chronic vexation at her folly by habitual irony, turned round to his brother and said, "I do admire the success of this compromise between worldliness and indolence; it keeps one well out of the trouble and provocations of the gay world, and yet allows of all the elegant little modes of conforming to its standard which agree with personal taste. I need only refer you to Augusta's drawing-rooms or the style of her dress as a proof."

John Felton replied with a safe gesture of partial agreement and an unsyllabled utterance, equally free from offence.

By the end of their visit, Constance had pretty well made up her mind that her aunt's style of religion did not work well with Adelaide. Selina's soul gave little sign one way or another—it was "deeply immersed in matter;" but poor Adelaide seemed to her so childish still, so utterly devoid of self-government, that she began to be fond of her under the youthful persuasion that she could do her a great deal of good by influence and serviceable advice—(Constance was but twenty-two). With this theory in her mind she did not *entirely* negative her aunt's gracefully pressing invitation to come and stay with them in the course of the summer; an invitation of which the kind object was betrayed by the earnest request that Constance would meanwhile carefully study the little volumes she then put into her hand as a parting gift. Her niece was sufficiently obliged to hope she should profit by them (not the least expecting that she should). Mrs. Robert Felton was sure she could not fail to do so "*abundantly;*" but, happily, just then her husband became impatient to be off, and

with affectionate nods, Constance watched the carriage rolling out of sight.

What a relief it was to get uncle Robert out of the house! but she missed Adelaide,—she certainly was loveable.

CHAP. V.

"Visit neighbours, for pleasure or penance;
Excellent people some, no doubt,
And the rest will do to talk about."—W. ALLINGHAM.

IT is one of the worst consequences of a very quiet life that the smallest incident may affect the imagination to an absurd degree. Something of this sort passed through the mind of Constance about three weeks after the Robert Feltons were gone, when sitting at her bedroom window, and for the fifth or sixth time during her reading looking up, as the sound of the gate announced some one coming into the drive,—an itinerant basket-seller, an old woman with her jug coming for broth, two little boys bringing one note, the gardener returning from dinner, and the piano-tuner all passed in succession,—and still Constance seemed to think a more welcome arrival might follow, and yawned over the eloquent book before her.

It was a dry bleak-winded day in April, when the sun only glanced out now and then under brown ridges of cloud, a wild eye shining for a moment from beneath the shaggy eyebrows of the stormy sky, with a dreary unsoftening light; a day that in spring-time is itself a disappointment. The fruit trees were white with blossom, but looked strange against the scowling clouds behind them, and the delicate willow swung its green pendants over the pond with a chilly helpless shiver.

From the place where she sat, Constance could see nothing that at all touched her sense of beauty except the lambs in an opposite field; they had done with their earliest games, their sudden triangular leaps, and tottering races down a slope, and were now intent upon the main chance, and continually standing up along the side of the field to nibble the young shoots of the quickset hedge. It pleased her to watch their fat white backs and contented nibblings; but she felt neither as good nor as happy as they. She was suffering from a rare attack of *ennui*. Adelaide had opened her eyes to the monotony of her home life, and she began to wish for a little more variety in it, a little more amusement. Home routine too had been rather tiresome since her cousins left. Mrs. Felton had given herself with cheerful energy to devising unobtrusive modes of retrenchment, and a few frugal measures having been carried out in the kitchen with unexpected success, she became quite elated, and talked of little besides when alone with Constance, only varying the turn of her conversation by frequent reference to their recent visitors.

There was not, indeed, much to say about them after the first family analysis had been gone through, for opinions were nearly unanimous; but good Mrs. Felton always found something to contrast regretfully with her own habits, something to admire, to cite and expatiate upon, in the appearance and conduct of new acquaintance, and this without exception. The truth was that at Ashenholt they lived in such a state of condensed dulness day after day, there was so little to stir the atmosphere within and without, that the occasional visit of the parish doctor sensibly deepened the stream of family conversation; whatever he said, whether of fact or generalised principle, was harvested in, and before

the day had expired all Mr. Bland's sayings were certain to be reproduced by one or other of the party. Now, though a good doctor, he had no sort of pretensions to singular illumination of mind, and when he merely observed to Mrs. Felton that it was often more advisable to strengthen general health by regimen than to attack a particular ailment in one part of the body, he never dreamed of adding much to her store of wisdom. She, however, was grateful enough to quote the remark with some emphasis more than once during Mr. Felton's next fit of rheumatism.

So Constance had become a little tired of hearing what her uncle had observed upon this or that subject, and her thoughts had reverted, by way of change, to remarks made by Mr. Hyde during the few times they had met him. How few! only twice since January, when he and his aunt stayed three days at Clayfield Lodge (the place where Constance was making her first visit to the Podmores), but there was "so much in these Hydes;" "certainly," she thought, "they are refreshing people."

While she came for the twentieth time to this conclusion, her eyes still bent on the lambs opposite the window, a call from Mrs. Felton summoned her down.

"My dear, why do you sit up in your room this cold day? you look quite blue. I have been wanting you to settle how I should answer this note."

"Oh, I'm sorry I was out of the way, but the drawing fire was smoking so wretchedly, and in the dining-room it was nearly out; what is the question, mamma?"

"Why, Mrs. Wratislaw writes very kindly to ask us to dine with them the day after to-morrow, to meet a few nice friends of theirs; *friends*, she says, and 'not either of your neighbours who could be hurt at your

coming to us, and declining their more general invitations.' What do you say? your father does not care about it one way or the other, so you may decide."

"Oh, let us go then, dear mamma, by all means. I was just wishing for something to happen; and the Wratislaws are always pleasant."

It was not indeed much "to happen," but it was variety, and Constance reached their house on the appointed day with a merry heart. As to her looks, her beauty was so questionable that she felt it an encouraging kindness when friends treasured up and repeated any little compliment made to her personal appearance. She was not ugly, but had certainly no pretensions to beauty; and yet now and then her countenance was lovely and very warmly admired. Had she been a person used to all the exquisite appliances of a modern toilette, she might have been called elegant; but having too quick a sense of disadvantage in this respect, a certain oddness of manner mingled with her peculiar grace. That evening she was looking her best, animated and gay; the Wratislaws knew how to elicit her happiest social powers. Among other guests she was pleased and almost startled to see Basil Hyde. After those preliminary comments upon weather which are in society like the first pawn's move in a game of chess, she said to him, "I did not think we should meet you here; we did not know you were a friend of Mr. and Mrs. Wratislaw's."

"You hardly could, for I have not yet that honour; but we often met out hunting, and hearing me say something about the views between this place and Ashenholt, I suppose he thought I deserved to know more, for he asked me to dinner to-day, and to-morrow will show me a new line of country."

Dinner was announced, and Basil was told to take in a Miss Lyme who sat near them; a girl of dewy eyes and plump face, so young that her manner was still divided between the little girl's fear of doing or saying something out of place, and the great girl's shy expectation of admiring regard. Constance thought his conversation wasted on such a silent little creature, who was evidently more puzzled than amused by much that he said to her. Across the table she heard snatches of their talk.

"As for me," said Basil, "I am studying human nature in the pre-adamite period; to be without any data at all frees one so pleasantly from the embarrassment of facts, and is, it appears to me, the key to much of our success in forming new scientific theories."

"I don't understand geology at all," she replied, a little at a loss for his meaning, and taking the word "pre-adamite" for a geological term.

How complicated a game of social tactics is sometimes played during a short evening!—it was so in this case. Basil Hyde had been yet more inclined than Constance to get into a longer conversation than their last interview allowed; and she would have liked it, but by a succession of little counter-moves they had been divided or interrupted just as an opportunity occurred. Basil thought it intentional on the part of Constance, and wondered what she could find to interest her in the stiff harangues of a bald-headed little man who planted himself beside her as soon as tea was brought in. Constance fancied that Mr. Hyde was marvellously engrossed with Mrs. Tovey's recollections of Wiesbaden; and considered his politeness in turning over the pages for Miss Lyme quite thrown away, as she never opened her lips again when she had done

singing; but whilst thinking of each other, both of them were too well-bred to be rude to any one else.

The next day at breakfast Mrs. Felton did not fail to canvass the respective claims on admiration of each person they had met, nor her husband to shut out further interruption with the newspaper, when he had exhausted the subject, as he thought, by calling them "all well enough." So Constance had to accept or dispute verdicts. She did not think Miss Lyme silly, only shy and slow, decidedly pretty. Mrs. Wratislaw's cap *had* too much ribbon on it; she thought her dress handsome, yet almost too grave for her age. Yes, Mr. Hyde's eyes were very fine, but she thought him too satirical, he was too caustic for her taste, he spoke as if something had embittered him, and, through all his merriment, looked very sad sometimes; the Toveys were remarkably pleasing, but seemed to her to speak of nothing but their travels. And so the idle talk ran on till the butcher's book being brought in, caused a fortunate break-off, and sent Mrs. Felton to her practical business, and Constance to her usual morning studies.

Basil Hyde suffered himself to be induced to stay another day at the Wratislaws, and then another; he was welcome everywhere, an essentially popular man: at this time he was even more than usually undetermined and idle. He was not in love with Constance then; there is something not like being in love, nor being "in vanity" (as one of our novelists has described the state in question), which one can only call being "in interest" about a person: this precedes a real affection, but is by no means invariably followed by it.

Basil thought, "Miss Felton is a nice girl, very sensible too; she probably likes me, so do most of them for the matter of that, but she is harder to please, and

so one takes more pride in pleasing." He found her singularly unaffected also; and having a naturally sincere character, though the world had laid over it several coatings of varnish, he fully appreciated the absolute candour of hers; besides, it was agreeable to him to meet such a vivid mind in the depths of the country. He told himself it was nothing more than agreeable; *he* had done with all that sort of thing—had suffered too much already—and was now some years past thirty; too old for romance.

And so thinking he rode away from the Wratislaws and turned off into the road to Ashenholt. A farewell call seemed to him advisable, and perfectly meaningless; but when he had spent more than half an hour with Constance and Mr. Felton in their pretty garden, he found himself willingly accepting an invitation to stay to luncheon, and felt covetous of her quiet presence during the intervening hour and a half. As that time passed she did not know what would be its worth in after estimates. She found it pleasant to be with him, but squandered the minutes which by and by would seem so precious. He followed her about the garden, where some alterations were being planned, with eager attention,—she hardly gave him hers; he came into the drawing-room after she went in, and wished to help her wind the skeins of netting silk she had taken out, but she remembered a note that she ought to write, and tried to absorb herself in it so completely as almost not to hear his lively chat with Mrs. Felton and the child. Then he offered after luncheon to accompany her to the post with the important note, but she had promised to call on several poor people that afternoon, and could leave her note on the way, so she would not trouble him. He said that he *must* go at three; she

put on her bonnet as soon as luncheon was over nevertheless, and shook hands before she left the house; but, when the gate shut behind her, wished much to see him again—wondered why she had kept so stiffly to her previous intentions—hoped her father might walk with him to see their picturesque church, which lay in her road, and so they might meet again—made a few hurried cottage visits—was greatly dissatisfied with her half-hearted interest in the answers of those she spoke to—and came home by the shortest way, to find him gone, and her mother loading the dining-room table with huckaback in preparation for a great cutting out of towels.

CHAP. VI.

"An undefined longing came over him of mingled pain and pleasure and unremembered wishes. Ah! it was the whole nature awaking and thirsting after the heavenly gifts of life, that lay as yet concealed, undefined, and colourless in the deep folds of the heart; but an accidental sunbeam partially reveals them."—J. P. RICHTER'S *Autobiography*.

CONSTANCE had not enough to do, she was sure of that; she found herself so often busy with daydreams; and the sweet April days tempted her to so much aimless idling out of doors. One afternoon, after making daisy bracelets for little Mary on the garden seat, she remained there when the child was called in to tea, gazing on the mountain ash opposite, which lifted up its curved branches to the soft west wind, each looking like a smouldering brand, until the perfect green feather came out. A quire of starlings sat on the highest boughs of a large elm close by, and filled the sunshiny air with their long low whistling. So much peaceful beauty around her, — so much disturbed thought within!

She had been turning over in her mind all sorts of uncertainties, the most prominent among them being one so common to solitaries at her age —"What *shall* I do with these long hours?" Starting up with sudden resolution she hastened to the house, and asked her mother if there was any pudding she might take to a poor woman who was in a decline; she thought she should enjoy the walk this lovely evening, and then,

provided with what she asked for, set off towards the village. It was no prudent decision which actuated her then, but a sudden remembrance of David's old injunction: "Trust in the Lord and be doing good,"—"the little I can do at least," thought Constance.

Poor Mrs. Jones was very glad to see her; she was trying, when Constance went in, to undress two refractory little fellows, who made such a racket in the cottage, that until they were safe in bed there was no peace for her faint and aching head.

"It's full early, ma'am, but they do tear about so all day long, and Bobby he's rubbing his nose a bit now, so I think he'll sleep; if they was but old enough for school how glad I should be!"

Constance would not let her finish the undressing, and begging her to lie back in her chair, she unfastened the little frocks, and prevailed on Ned, a rosy-faced ruffian four years old, to stop his clamorous "Mammy! mammy! Bobby's gotten my shoe!" while she continued, between fits of violent coughing, to scold them for not minding their manners before the lady. The lady was more struck just then with the need of soap and water, but thinking that any remark upon it might distress their weakly mother, she proposed that saying their prayers should come next; and certainly it vexed her to see how much this procedure fell short of her expectations. Ned was some minutes in being got upon his knees at all, and when he knelt at last beside Bobby, he kept plucking the end of his mother's shawl, and letting the words of his prayer drop off his tongue in an unconnected way, like beans thrown out of a basket; whilst Bobby gave himself to scratching his knee with unabated interest in spite of his mother's whispered remonstrances.

Constance had expected them to behave more like the children in the vignettes of the society's tracts, for at present she knew more of these than of human nature. However she was pleased to have gone in just then, when she could really help, and she left her poor neighbour looking more comfortable. Walking slowly home she fancied what would be the expression of Mr. Hyde's face if he had found her so employed in that smoky room; "surprised at first," she thought, "and then pleased,—the bright glad look in his eye; he is satirical, but generous and very kind-hearted, I am sure—one can tell that from his face."

Any one might know what image fills the heart's centre, by noticing what spectrum the mind throws into times and places totally disconnected with it. If on every road, in every house, one thinks, "Perhaps I may meet so and so," enough is proved of heart occupation either by love or fear, for both have this effect. Constance might have discovered—she had time enough for self-examination—that the woof of her thoughts was now more or less shot (to use a manufactory term) with the image of Basil Hyde; his looks, his words, his opinions twisted more and more into the texture of her inner life. She *was* aware that she thought him the most interesting person she had ever met, and yet wished her cousin Harriet could see and pronounce upon him too; her clear common-place views of character were more to be trusted, as Constance often found, conscious that though she herself had more penetration for the latent good qualities of those she dealt with, Harriet had a juster appreciation of the *tout ensemble* of other natures, and she smiled to remember what a romantic notion she had entertained of a young doctor who had practised in their village a few

years ago, until Harriet observed that he only looked melancholy from awkward shyness, and that Charles had been quite surprised at the quantity of beer he drank on the cricket-field.

But she was too sensible to allow herself to dwell long upon thoughts of a person with whom she had nothing whatever to do. "Really," she said to herself on coming in, "I must have caught a little of Adelaide's folly, but I will put a stop to all that." So that evening, while her mother did accounts and her father dozed, she amused herself by drawing up a plan for the daily outlay of time; allowing so much for music, so much for German, needlework, and the like.

"Papa," she asked when he awoke, "will you let me have down that large German book on the top shelf in your study? I think I could read it now. I want to try."

"You shall try, my love, and welcome, but I confess I don't quite know what sort of reading you will find it; it's one of your poor mother's books, so no doubt it's all right."

"I should have thought Constance could read something more certainly profitable at her age," interposed Mrs. Felton, for she had just balanced her accounts in time to hear German reading spoken of; and her mind still stuck fast in the old prejudice that all German books taught heresy. Constance had learned this language by herself; Mrs. Felton could not read a word of it, but she knew that if any extremely wild notion was referred to in English books, there was generally a German name at the end, and this was conclusive.

"Have you finished Clarendon, my dear?"

"Oh no; but one cannot read history all day."

There was no further discussion, for Mr. Felton went

out of the room and soon returned with the book; its title-page softened his voice, as he said, putting it in his daughter's hands, "You will use any of her books carefully, I know."

Mrs. Felton had once hoped to find her little step-daughter's an impressible yielding nature, on which she could transcribe her own code of proprieties, her own list of indispensable acquirements; instead of finding such white paper, she soon perceived that this young mind was covered with a strange hieroglyphic, which she could neither decipher nor guess the drift of: it was a disappointment, and an unpleasant one, to be met with a mystery where a disciple had been expected; but an obedient loving heart she found; and when, after some new puzzle about Constance and her opinions, she used to apply to her father for the exercise of his parental authority, his bland reply, "Conny will do very well, let the girl alone—her mother was just like that," reassured her, and she resigned herself to managing an oddity, just as she would to the superintendence of a cripple, or a slightly deranged mind. She was fond of Constance, but to understand her seemed impossible.

There was an old Miss Tennent living about half a mile from Ashenholt, who haunted the place a good deal; one of those cheerful monuments of complete resignation, which may be met with in almost every village or town, walking about briskly in clothes of defunct fashion with a joyousness that many young hearts might envy. Her voice was not joyous, for it had that sort of half-swallowed tone which elderly women are likely to contract if accustomed to talk in a monotonous strain while bending over their needlework; but all her sentiments were wholesome and good, and

her mode of expression so kindly that people forgot she could suffer much herself, whilst so entirely given to sympathy. Altogether she appeared in about the same sort of condition that her rubbed furs presented to the eye, worn, dimmed, and very near being quite laid by; but she seemed to feel one disadvantage about as little as the other, humbly conscious of treasures out of sight which neither moth nor rust could touch. And yet, though her heart was set so high, it was astonishing what an appetite the dear old lady still retained for all the minutiæ of domestic life—gossip included. She was Mrs. Felton's strong ally in every domestic crisis; a faithful adviser upon all household questions, from the character of a cook to the proportions of sugar and fruit in preserves; to her also Mrs. Felton would express herself freely about any peculiarity in Constance, and though Miss Tennent had seldom more to say in reply upon this point, than a kindly "Poor thing!" or "Ah! dear young lady—indeed—surely!" it was a relief.

To Constance herself the frequent visits of their old neighbour were often a burden, which her strong sense of duty would not allow her to confess. Beyond an occasional "Oh mamma! there's Miss Tennent again!" she never departed from the assumption that it was always a pleasure to see her, and when she had a toothache or a sprain, it must have been; for Miss Tennent could cite so many examples of rapid cure from the receipts she copiously prescribed; and had besides a soothing variety of little inarticulate groans wherewith to recognise every new symptom. All this was more agreeable to a suffering body than to a studious mind; and so Constance, knowing the length of Miss Tennent's visits, and the frequency of their return, got her father's per-

mission to read for two hours of the forenoon in his study, whatever he might be about; a great boon, which secured to her some of the happiest moments, and to him no little pleasure, though he seldom appeared to notice her. She carried out her plan of occupation so vigorously that before Midsummer came she had almost exorcised the unquiet feeling that had disturbed her.

With the Midsummer holidays, her cousin Harriet came back and put new life into the home party; the glowing months slid smoothly by, and when the first week of October came, Constance was ready to fulfil a promise often repeated to Mrs. Podmore, that she would spend a little time at Clayfield Lodge. "A little time," as she and her parents were careful to repeat; "a nice long visit" was the only term which Mrs. Podmore would accept as her due.

Owing to her early association with the first Mrs. Felton at school, there was between the two families a strong connection of memory; little besides, though she seemed to be doing her best to strengthen the tie by gratitude. She always spoke of Constance as "poor little Constance Felton," a phrase referable to the time of her mother's death. The step-mother alluded to Mrs. Podmore as "that kind Mrs. Podmore," in acknowledgment of her yearly presents to Constance, who, as well as Mr. Felton, mentioned her simply by name, without any notice of the impression she made on their minds, as that of a person inclined to beset her friends with very energetic patronage.

CHAP. VII.

"But that meek man was destined to obey
A sovereign lady's unremitted sway;
Who bore no partial, no divided rule,—
All were obedient pupils in her school.
She had religious zeal, both strong and sour,
That gave an active sternness to her power;
But few could please her; she herself was one
By whom that deed was very seldom done."—CRABBE.

THE pressure of *muddle* has an enormous force; people do not know how much it may influence them, until they enter a circle where freedom from muddle is almost unimagined, and its disgrace and discomfort so usual that it is but dimly perceived. I believe if the Duke of Wellington had spent three or four days at Clayfield Lodge, the early dinner of the last day would have found him sitting beside Mrs. Podmore, meek, dejected, wordless, without any nerve for resistance or any energy of hope.

Constance was full of indefinite hope as she drove up to the long flat-fronted house; but when on the following day she looked out of its windows, she felt perfectly nerveless. "Oh!" she thought, "how shall I get through three weeks of it?"

There *are* disagreeable people in the world, much as one would wish to deny it for the sake of charity; there are most unpleasant people extant; and though, like children playing at hunt-the-slipper, each of us may refuse to confess that *we* know such people, we

can see well enough that our neighbour is eagerly trying to shuffle on something that looks very like them. But poor Mr. Podmore could not attempt that, and of course never allowed himself to wish it either. From his manner, which was singularly passive, Constance had concluded, when first she saw him, that he must have been subjected to very long trials; it was the manner of a person whose nature is utterly subdued: grace subdues the evil tendencies of nature, but not its buoyancy, — his, if he ever had it, was long gone, and to express his own wishes or opinions — most of all his will — was the last thing that occurred to him. The truth was, that he had been thirty years submitted to the influence of an importunate wife, whose steady egotism, though largely mixed with affection to himself, was none the less potent to smother the peculiarities of his own nobler disposition, and to make all but his conscience a slave.

It may be doubted whether any external calamity breaks the spirit so entirely as the frequent collision of a generous temper with one incurably selfish and perverse; this takes the joy and calmness of life out of every struggling hour, and at last you come to thinking circumstances more flexible than some tormenting feelings. It is true these vary: you may go aside from an angry temper, to forget, if possible, its pricks, and returning to the family party you may find it smooth as silk, callers having diverted the unhappy spirit, or occupation fortified it, and you may think "where is my grief now?" in a way that you cannot of a bereavement, or great anxiety, or pecuniary loss; on the other hand you may survive the anguish of separation,—may outlive the trial of suspense, — may get used to privations; but who can live down the provocations of a spite-

ful temper or a malicious mind? and who but Socrates ever got so used to it as not to smart afresh under their constant discharge of bitter poison drops?

There was — as there always is — much excuse for Mrs. Podmore's unpleasant temper. She had had a life of considerable hardships and disappointment in her early years; she had been soured by the cruel injustice of those on whom she depended after her mother's death; and Mr. Podmore, a prosperous banker in the neighbourhood, who knew all she had gone through, married her as much from pity as from love, vainly thinking, as many have before and since, that a better soil would improve the stunted ill-grown plant. This fallacy he soon discovered; but whatever else experience may have taught him, he was not the least disappointed in his wife's religious *opinions;* on these they were unanimous, though in conduct so unlike.

Mr. Podmore could hardly be persuaded to take any care of himself, but his wife had given her family to understand that *her* health depended entirely on everything being kept comfortable about her, and that annoyance of any kind would cause proportionate physical disturbance. It was the rooted belief among them all, that mamma's well-being was contingent on her being kept in good humour, and the threats of illness which she indulged in now and then were regarded by her husband in so serious a light that he would gladly have made any sacrifice of his own comfort to avert the usual formula, "My love, it may be all very well for you, but if it brings on one of my bad attacks ——"

To Constance she was overwhelmingly affectionate; she loved her with something of pure unselfish love, for the sake of her mother, the gentle, clever girl, who

used to help her in their old school days—to help her and put up sweetly with a temper that was spiteful then. It was no wonder if the young Podmores disliked Constance at first, for their mother had made her the ideal measure to which *their* virtues never came up; and never mentioned her without praise, to the effect that, compared with *her*, every one of them was a failure. This tone of laudation wore off when Constance was with them, and some other absentee was then used as a mould for the disparagement of those present; for her manner of praising had generally a latent tendency to lessen the self-satisfaction of those who heard her; it was calculated to imply, without saying so, that those of whom she spoke had a monopoly of such and such virtues, and she had the still greater art of making it appear that those present were incapacitated even for the appreciation of the merits she noticed. "A very estimable young woman is Constance Felton," she would reiterate with a reproachful twang in her voice; though no one entertained a contrary opinion.

There were three sons and three daughters in this family. The eldest son, James, was his father's partner in the bank of Clayfield; Alfred, at school, of whom Constance had little remembrance, except that each pair of trousers he had appeared in during her previous visit, was more flagrant in colour and enormous in check than the last. Dicky, the youngest, had hardly attained self-command enough to prevent his slapping any one who provoked him; and he still eased his feelings by "flanking" everything in the room with a very dusty pocket-handkerchief at all odd minutes.

Johanna, the eldest Miss Podmore, who resembled her father in disposition, but with more acuteness of mind, had become slightly embittered from the in-

equalities of their domestic *régime.* In the highest degree conscientious, it was difficult to her to submit to her mother without contracting very gloomy views of human nature. She was "full of good works," but her manner of doing them had no touch of joyfulness in it: indeed, she seemed to consider the poor people with whom she had to do, as, for the most part, so reprobate that it was more for the sake of carrying out her idea of duty than from any delight in being among them, that she performed her daily round of charitable service in school or cottages. Her very accents told of melancholy reproach and total mistrust; feelings not so indifferent to the honest English cottager as to be entirely compensated for by old linen, tracts, and caudle.

But there was, in all that Johanna Podmore said or did, the unmistakable stamp of religious motive. Her mind was very narrow, but intent on the fulfilment of duty; it rose high above selfish interests, and unconsciously commanded the respect of all who knew her. Hester and Sarah, girls of fourteen and sixteen, might have been called, figuratively, the sediment of the family, — the heavy and coarser particles that generally lay inert on the lowest side of the domestic scale; if in conjunction, lounging, yawning, and tittering, yet, when brought into connection with the rest of the home party, giving a strength and colouring to the whole mixture which it could ill spare.

There was very little conversation among the Podmores: the mother had scolded and fretted her children into taciturnity, and when they spoke it was with the hasty indistinctness of speech which is common to those who use words for a means of getting what they *want,* either food or information or assistance, rather than as the expression of what they have to communicate of

thought, or feeling, or fact. When by a rare chance they got upon any theoretic subject, they dogmatised, because they were wholly unused to see things from any point of view but their own; and yet sometimes Constance could not help being struck with the *aplomb*—the instinctive wisdom unbiassed by any theory, to which nature seemed to help them; in recompense, as one might suppose, for having restricted the use of their tongues to advancing the claims of nature.

Their voices, too, were a real trial to Constance. Mr. and Mrs. Podmore were apt to give vent to their emotions by various chuckling sounds, which aggravated her impatience, and shook her nerves more than thunder could: and as for the children—perhaps their lachrymal glands were habitually overworked, for their voices generally sounded like an accompaniment to tears; not from the pathetic *timbre* we hear in some rich voices, but with low and whiny tones, that kept both hearing and patience at full stretch. It was no wonder; if people are so unfortunate as to have used their voices for an emollient to ill-temper during some years, their tones must inevitably be affected.

Rather dismayed by the prospect of spending three weeks in such a party, Constance ended her review of the circle by the satisfactory conclusion that at least she must be better for companionship with such a person as Johanna. "I will try to learn good from her," she thought, "and not mind all these little unpleasantnesses; but I wish they did not all wear such noisy shoes!"

But Johanna was not a person easy of access; sad and cold in manner as those often are whose taste is perpetually pained by the people they should best love, she was peculiarly unable to understand such a nature

as that of Constance Felton. Certainly she did not know

> "what maintains
> The quick returns of courtesy and wit;" *

and when observing the behaviour of those who did, she was inclined to suppose them guilty of cajolery and condemnable "men-pleasing" talents; and though the simplicity of their visitor's politeness a little shook her prejudices, she regarded her with suspicion still, and Constance felt that she did. Constance felt the softness and sweetness of her own nature come against the harder manner of the other, with a contrast unpleasant to both, less so to herself, for she was more conversant in differences of character, than to Johanna, who, in her unpliant bluntness, knew not what *instinctive* courtesy meant. When, therefore, Constance spoke to her, the effect produced was often as evident as on the application of soda to acid; something equal to a hiss — a rougher manner and a harsher tone, making Constance aware that unless she could veil her own constitutional delicacy and grace, they would be mistaken for affectation, and despised accordingly.

* George Herbert.

CHAP. VIII.

"What a gift had John Hasebach, professor at Vienna, in tediousness! who, being to expound the prophet Esay to his auditours, read twenty-one years on the first chapter, and yet finished it not."—FULLER.

THE day but one after Constance reached Clayfield Lodge was Sunday. She had hoped much from this Sunday, and was disappointed. Johanna hurried away to a distant school before the rest of the family had finished breakfast. After breakfast Mr. Podmore and James were only visible at church-time and at luncheon, —except at church, speechless; and Mrs. Podmore was at issue with Dicky and his catechism in the forenoon, and in the afternoon with the three girls and their accounts of divers missions to several places difficult to spell, and impossible to pronounce.

Constance, sitting behind a very wide-backed biography of a good man (whose friends had determined that after his death, at least, his light should not want a candlestick), tried to read what Mrs. Podmore had recommended as a precious memorial, but found it impossible. She never knew what to do with herself while scolding was going on; and poor Dicky's ears looked *so* red and hot during the process, and his sisters so confused under the cross-examination to which they were subjected.

"Do you walk after church?" she asked, as they left the house for afternoon service.

"We don't wish to set such an example," replied Johanna, leaving the sister addressed no time to reply.

It was the first time Constance had heard of any objection to Sunday walks, and she meditated upon it in silence, with a regretful remembrance of her home Sundays — happy ones to her — for she and her father and mother generally had a walk all together on Sunday.

The sermon that afternoon was a good plain-spoken warning, upon the text, "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil;" . . . "therefore, choose life that thou and thy seed may live" (Deut. xxx. 15, 19); and the preacher had, to her great satisfaction, enlarged on the power of the human will, on its freedom to choose good. Mr. and Mrs. Podmore agreed, after dinner, that there was a dangerous tendency to will-worship in Mr. Davy's teaching; and, with an eye to an antidote, the family was at once invited to hear a sermon of very different tone. Much was said in it about *recumbency* on the Saviour, which Constance longed to have answered with an equal stress on the Apostle's words, "Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about," &c., and "fight the good fight of faith."

Hester and Sarah had just before dinner transacted a grand squabble upstairs, which ended by Hester telling Sarah that she should spite her now whenever she could, and in Hester's rejoining that she did not care what a vixen like her said, she was sure; and during the reading Sarah was engaged in furtively removing raisins from the dish that stood near her into her mouth, making as little show of eating as was possible; and, Dicky being asleep, she was not detected. On the consciences of these members of Mr. Podmore's audience, at least, the exhortation he gave them *not* to go about to establish their own righteousness, fell with

soporific leniency. He was fond of reading aloud on Sundays; it pleased his wife too. After tea he again lifted up his voice, and read out from a book much in repute at Clayfield Lodge. Its writer had made sure of being "ware of philosophy," and indeed of any other "vain deceit" which might have veiled the paucity of his ideas, and the hard-beaten track of his argument. There was a contempt of philosophy, and of logic as well, manifest in his style of reasoning, which Mr. Podmore particularly admired (for he had formed his own upon it), and the display of ignorance of human nature pleased him too; he drew from it the conclusion that his favourite author knew more of grace than of nature, that in him the spiritual man had long lost sight of the natural man. A very opposite conclusion was in the mind of Constance while listening to the intemperate tirades poured out upon a class of people who held different opinions from the writer's, or who refrained from sweeping aside all intellectual difficulties as the workings of a carnal mind. Poor Mr. Podmore sometimes felt puzzled, for, being himself one of the humblest spirits, he could not at once recognise Christian meekness in all this extravagance of censure; but he thought obscurely of Elijah and St. John as stern reprovers of error, and raised his eyebrows higher, and his voice to a louder and more untunable pitch, by way of preventing his hearers from being struck with the same apparent inconsistency.

It is tiresome enough, at the end of a day given up to reading and prayer, to proceed to the study of the emphatic pages of a divine who combats opinions you never held, exhausting to read his declamatory interjections and indignant questioning on subjects which you think admit of none; but how far worse is all this

in the living shape of a man, pleased with his own rhetoric on some religious point, who, between the hours of 9 and 10 P.M., *will* exact your attention, who searches for an attentive eye, and reiterates any sentence which he fancies may have escaped an inattentive ear! You *can* shut your book, and withdraw your marker for good, but Constance could neither shut up her host nor escape from the stream of inconclusive eloquence to which, on Sunday evenings, he was prone.

An hour's reading had not told upon his voice. When the book was closed at last, he stood on the hearth-rug elaborating the most tedious truisms on the subject of Sabbath observance. To the spirit of his enunciations, Constance, as well as the rest of his hearers, cordially assented; but instead of being surprised, as we sometimes are, to see how fresh an old truth cleverly handled may appear, she wondered at the exhaustive dulness with which he clothed his heartfelt zeal. This sort of monologue was the only prolonged form of speech which his wife seemed to enjoy from him. It appeared to agree with her to fix dull eyes upon him during these harangues, with an expression of satisfied stupor in her face, as if she would say in dumb show: "Go on, Jerome, be as lengthy as your breath allows; on this point no one, not even I, *can* dispute your right to dogmatise."

Oh! that sleepy clock on the mantelpiece! did it not pause after striking nine, as if an angel spoke, and time stopped to listen? No, it ticked on; and so did Mr. Podmore, till it was long past ten. "Only two more Sundays here," thought Constance as she went upstairs that night. But the Podmores were all too kind to her for such thoughts to be indulged in often; she was a devoted guest, and felt it her duty to be pleased; — to

avoid noticing the untidy accumulations on the drawing-room sofa; — to be interested in her host's long-drawn narratives of missionary labours, and in his wife's lamentations over her own weak health, and her children's corrupt inclinations; but indeed it was difficult to keep sympathy awake many days together. Constance longed to be able to tell Mrs. Podmore plainly that she looked at the faults of other people through the magnifying lenses of her own; but all she could do was to try and draw conversation towards more general interests; — a virtuous effort seldom successful here.

James Podmore, being of a rather silent habit himself, acted like a slate in the fire for deadening whatever interest had been for a few minutes alive; his presence alone was paralysing to Constance, not only because he was wont to gaze at her with an unspeculative fixity of eye, but from his tendency to contest every fact that was advanced by people who spoke with tongues more unloosed than his own. He had neither wit nor penetration, but a great desire for exactness, and just that sort of detective agility of mind which enabled him at once to overtake any cleverer person in the commission of a blunder or unconscious misstatement; and Constance found herself not unfrequently tripped up, as she ran on in some amusing recital, by his grave voice begging her pardon, but she must be "aware that so and so was a slightly incorrect statement," or, would she "have the kindness to inform him how that could be?" The girls often said they were quite afraid of opening their mouths before James, he was so particular; and told Constance that she was wonderful for making him talk. He had said more in the last few days than he usually did in two or three weeks. It may have been that this made her feel a

little pride of art in talking to him, or that when he talked he could not watch her so uninterruptedly. Certain it was, that, though feeling as if by nature she could never have a word to say to him, by careful endeavour she succeeded, and was sometimes so pleased with herself for not being daunted by his manner, that it almost seemed as if she was pleased with him.

Natural delicacy prompting her to hide every perception of his dulness, she behaved towards him with the instinctive deference of a generous mind; a quicker companion she would have been less anxious to shield from any mortifying impression: he was so inferior in mind as to mistake this anxiety, and his vanity sometimes gave it an interpretation which she would have thought *inconceivable.*

But the combativeness of the son's conversation was not so quenching to her powers as the personal turn always given to it by the mother. Nothing of general interest could be referred to by Constance, without Mrs. Podmore giving it, directly or indirectly, a personal application. Now in conversation, as soon as a person drags back a general principle to an individual instance, as a mode of proving it, we feel that an unpleasant monopoly of experience is implied; and it lowers both the tone of conversation, and the estimate we form of one who is confine to the narrowness of personal knowledge, without a glance towards that clear expanse of truth which is open to insight, and sympathy *with humanity at large.* For example, suppose one says "How strange the surprise of joy seems when for weeks you have struggled to let go your hope!" "Yes," says your friend, "I have heard Uncle Tom describe just that feeling when poor Louisa got better;"—you, all the time knowing much less of Uncle Tom

and Louisa than you do of the general principles of human nature, and of course being likely to care much less, are made aware by such a reply that the speaker *cannot* see anything abstractedly, and therefore will not recognise the verdicts of intuitive perception.

With this warp of personality, there was at Clayfield Lodge the disparaging tone usual among minds of small calibre. Carlyle says truly, "To the mean eye all things are trivial, as certainly as to the jaundiced they are yellow;" and thus, without any unkind intention, there was, in all the Podmore notions, an abating, discolouring effect, which, to the mind of Constance (always intent on exalting and refining objects, and resolute in looking away from every dark and degrading view of human nature), was something peculiarly repulsive and dejecting. She bore these, and many other distastes consequent upon Podmore characteristics, with praiseworthy good-humour, but her spirits sank. The process of adaptation to an inferior order of mind is *very* taming; there is first incredulity and vexed astonishment at the differences perceived; then a secret struggle for bringing in imagined reforms; then hopeless submission, and meek silence under the pressure which is at last known to be irresistible. Almost the only thing which gave her a vivid pleasure now, were Mrs. Podmore's occasional reminiscences of her mother's early days — if she could but lure her away from present dissatisfactions and get her into long stories about what went on at school, Constance was happy. There was another thing that she found rather pleasant among the Podmores — frequent allusion to the Hydes; had she observed herself more closely, she might have known that the least mention of Basil Hyde left on her mind a trail of unmistakable sweetness and pleasure. She heard no one

speak of his being likely to come there that autumn, and for some reason felt reluctant to ask if he was expected.

The days passed by very slowly: the Friday after she came, she woke with one of those headaches which seem so much worse while one is being bored, and are almost forgotten during agreeable moments; but few of these were allowed that day. The Podmores were singularly excited, for a missionary meeting in the neighbouring town was stimulating their moral sense to an unusual degree of hopefulness. Twenty times in the course of the day she heard Mrs. Podmore expatiate upon the very gratifying meeting that was to be expected. Constance had a great disinclination for attending it, but could not truly say she was disabled by headache, and went; when there, however, and hearing a man whose long toils, and hardships, and risks had given him simplicity and conciseness of style, she felt her zeal beginning to kindle under the influence of a powerful and ardent spirit; this set her thinking upon the folly of running down superior abilities as hindrances to piety. She saw that folly and unbraced brains *could* bring into discredit even the truths of the Gospel, and, on the other hand, that the Almighty is glorified by wise and skilful servants, when they are wholly given to His service. Occupied with these thoughts she hardly heard what was said by others in the same carriage, as they drove home.

"Nonsense, Dicky," Johanna had twice repeated, "do not say that again — it could *not* have been Mr. Hyde you saw there."

"It *was* though," muttered the boy, "and he kept staring up towards our seat."

Constance sat upright with sudden energy, and said, "Are you expecting Miss Hyde here this autumn, Mrs. Podmore?"

"Oh no, my dear; she's gone with her nephew to Eastbourne: we heard from them lately. If Dicky had had any concern for those poor benighted souls in the Pacific, he would not have been fancying likenesses in strange faces."

Constance saw, as the carriage just then passed by the lamps at a turnpike, that Dicky was making a face at his mother expressive of the utmost contempt: but she looked too threatening for any further question to be risked. At supper Constance was guilty of pandering to Dicky's appetites, so far as to help him without question to some sweet cakes, for which he was apt to apply more often than his mother approved. She longed to question him, but no opportunity offered till the next morning before prayers, when, coming down rather early, she found him in the dining-room, intent upon driving a scissor-sheath of his mother's into a crack in the wainscot behind the curtains, only known to him.

"Oh, Dicky! what mischief you are doing! mamma will be looking for that soon, you know."

Only another poke and a vicious grin.

"Dicky, pray pull that out again, and come and tell me who you saw in the town-hall last night."

"Lots of people."

"But who could you have taken for Mr. Hyde?"

"Himself, to be sure. I say, don't let out about the sheath here, unless you want me to have a dozen moral songs to learn in mother's room, and she in a fine taking all day."

CHAP. IX.

"He had so much sprightliness and vivacity, and such an expression of benevolence in his manner, and such an unceasing flattery of those he liked (and he never kept company with any one else) — the kind commendation of a lover, not the adulation of a sycophant — that he was truly irresistible, and his entry to a company was like opening a window and letting the sun into a dark room." — Dr. A. CARLYLE's *Autobiography.*

CONSTANCE began that day with most wise and virtuous resolutions; she would be very busy at least. As soon as breakfast was over she sat down to write to Adelaide (with whom she had agreed to correspond) with unusual pleasure and interest: Adelaide's faults were so remote from those now fretting her in nearer companionship; Adelaide's nature so soft and easy-going compared to Johanna Podmore's stiff and uncompromising habits of virtue, that it seemed quite a relief to turn away from them to an entirely opposite direction, and the tone of her letter was so affectionate and confiding, that, if Adelaide had taken much notice of such things, it might have struck her as inconsistent and strange. Before it was finished Johanna came in, and rather brusquely inquired whether she wished to hear any more of Chalmers' Life. Constance liked the book very much, and though thinking that the writing desk open before her sufficiently showed her present wishes, she closed it at once, and willingly prepared herself to listen.

Johanna had her father's taste for reading aloud,

"reading out," as she said, very accurately describing her style of reading; for her voice was calculated to reach some way off, having more resonance than modulation; and it was perhaps her only means of reading, for certainly if she read to herself she took nothing *in*.

After reading for about an hour, she told Constance that she must leave off and go to her usual cottage lectures. Saturday was her regular day for these. Constance asked to go with her, but though Johanna had been considerably mollified by her warm admiration of the missionary's speaking, she declined the pleasure of her company, wishing to be alone as she walked, so that nothing might distract her thoughts from the subject she intended to speak about: her sisters would be very glad to walk with Constance if they might, and it was a beautiful day. Beautiful indeed — a trance of still sunshine seemed to hold the outer world; even the glancing threads of gossamer were motionless. It was the season of berries; they were hanging in lovely variety on hedges drenched with dew: every leaf and stalk seemed so saturated with warm moisture, and so strong in its determination still to grow and to flourish in its growth, that Constance could hardly believe autumn was already begun — already firing the woods, and peopling damp nooks with crowds of fairy-like fungi.

On such a day solitude would have been a luxury to her, but the girls looked so pleased when they all sallied out together, that she could not wish for it then; and their walk was pleasant and peaceable, until, by ill-luck, Sarah made some slighting observation upon Hester's morning work — a *résumé* of what they had heard the previous evening — and Hester, firing up, declared that Sarah only said that because she thought her own so fine; whereas *she* knew that a long bit of it had been

taken out word for word from a Report, with a little alteration of names. Upon this followed a long and half-smothered bickering, which Constance ceased to listen to, when she saw that her attempts to interrupt it were quite unavailing.

When she was first with the Podmores she had been surprised to find such rude and obvious failings, unchecked, in the characters of those whose standard had been from their infancy very high, who had—as they said themselves—come out from the world so early (too early, it seemed, for them to perceive the radical similarity of their sort of worldliness to that against which they declaimed), but by degrees she discovered one cause of this strange incongruity between profession and practice. It was their habit to apply none but the *highest* motives of action to every concern, irrespectively of its relative importance; hence the discernment of proportion was lost; and as they sought to decide upon subjects by rules which could not *directly* bear upon them—disregarding those minor morals which are indispensable for social life, and never allowing the legitimate exercise of taste, and reason, and conventional propriety—they often acted and spoke in a way that outraged all these powers, without coming at all nearer to the fulfilment of Christian duty. They were, in short, disagreeable by principle, for they took no trouble to agree with anything except their own notions of right and wrong; and if these notions were at fault, *much* harm was done to the cause they so truly loved by their unwavering belief that error and worldliness lay outside their circle, and truth and piety within it.

It was dinner time when the girls returned from their walk; the Podmores dined at one, upon digestive principles. To Constance it was an irksome time. Being

unused to the process of early dinners, she felt it very trying to spend an hour and a half sitting round a table, heavily meeting other eyes, slowly exchanging occasional remarks — of a nature so common that they could hardly elicit two opinions, — facing in full daylight the unsoftened dulness and plainness of countenances, where feature was seldom forgotten in expression. It is not perhaps uncommon to dislike early dinners; the prospect of evening relaxations, and the prettier change of dress, make dinner time pleasant by candle-light, but in the full despatch of mid-day occupation to be arrested by a tedious presentation of food and faces often brings on irritation and dumb annoyance: the hindrance is vexing, and those who combine to promote it, become unconscious offenders. To-day Constance looked round the table, and fancied, in her pettish fatigue, that every face looked as stiff and cold as the hashed venison which was just then about to be removed. At that moment the door-bell rang, and Basil Hyde walked lightly in.

Every one but Dicky expressed great surprise; every one without exception was heartily glad to see him; Constance *so* glad that she could give but a silent welcome.

"But how came you to be here and not at Eastbourne with your aunt, dear Mr. Hyde?" asked Mrs. Podmore when they were reseated.

"Oh, you know I do not pretend to be shackled with any plans. My cousin Elinor wished to go too, and as I knew they would get on very well without me, and I should be much better for a little of the shooting Mr. Podmore kindly offered, I let them go on, and ran down here — for ten days or so, if you are inclined to have me."

"Nothing could please us more; but can it be that

you were at Clayfield yesterday, and did not come on here? Dicky was sure that he saw you at the meeting in the town-hall last night."

"Dicky's a sharp fellow," replied Basil; "I *was* there, Mrs. Podmore, and very much pleased; but you see I could not come and invade you at once, after refusing, notwithstanding your hospitable invitation: so I brought my man and dog to Clayfield, and waited till to-day to come up and reconnoitre."

There was not much explanation in his answer, but nothing that Basil said or did was likely to be found fault with in this house: by a strange kind of fascination his high-spirited ease of manner carried all before him; and though Mrs. Podmore was careful to testify that she could not wholly *approve* of the young man, and though Mr. Podmore regarded his own affection for him as almost an infirmity, yet his presence was like sunshine to their hearts, and even Johanna looked less severe the moment his laugh was heard.

In the intervals of his hasty dinner, and lively conversation with all at his end of the table, he observed Constance with a keen glance; she looked graver than she used to look,—heavy-eyed, as if her thoughts had come to the windows of the brain, and lingered there, unstirred by communication with other minds: the light that often shone in her face while talking, was absent now, as she listened to something Mr. Podmore was saying, with that weary pleasureless smile which only amiable people can compose, and with the scrupulous attention that such people give to a talker whose every turn of thought they have found to be hemmed in by prejudice. And when she answered him from time to time, Basil thought it was "with accents

miserably mild:" he easily guessed what sustained efforts at being pleased the gentle girl had made. He was surprised at feeling so much interest about her, he the hardheaded sensible man, and she a secluded girl, and not even a pretty one.

As soon as it was possible after dinner, he joined the ladies and proposed a game of croquet, before the day grew colder. Constance did not know the game — so much the better, he could soon teach her; she and Dicky should be on his side, against the two younger girls, and that would make it fairer, as they accused him of always making his side win from being more practised. So they went out, and played on the lawn till the last long sunbeam had left it; and then came a pleasant stroll about the garden, when Basil spoke to Constance as only one of spiritual kindred could speak. Her eye had brightened and her voice lost the irksome measured tone which told of so much command over *ennui;* but now the subject of their conversation stirred her soul to its depths, and she warmly seconded the girls' proposal for one turn more. Sarah had asked Mr. Hyde for a ghost story (a tabooed pleasure in their family), and after telling them several instances of unaccountable noises and sights, he glided from facts to theories still more interesting to one of his hearers; but then Hester remembered that it was time to dress for tea, and only Sarah cared to listen any longer to what her older companions were saying. They talked of death and the after life. Some subjects are so much beyond human reason, that only a certain set of thoughts can be expressed about them: Basil's part in this conversation was an instance, and yet Constance was struck by its originality; a deep voice, an earnest gaze, a tenderly respectful manner give to common-place words

so much seeming weight. But they were now cut short by a loud rapping at the drawing-room window, and significant gestures from Mrs. Podmore within warned them that it was high time for prudent people to be indoors. "And really, Mr. Hyde," she said with an aggrieved voice, as he re-entered the drawing-room, "I shall expect you to let *us* be the better for your society now; the young ones have absorbed you most unconscionably this afternoon."

"The young ones and the lovely weather, dear Mrs. Podmore; you cannot think how deliciously warm it is, even now—and the new moon just in sight; why didn't you come out and enjoy the evening with us?"

"Oh, thank you, it would not suit me: Mr. Podmore has a strong objection to my being out late; he knows my delicacy too well to allow of such risks."

This was one of Mrs. Podmore's peculiarities that most frequently provoked Constance. She would take divers precautions with regard to her own health while declaring that it was "Mr. Podmore's wish;" it was he who had expressly desired that she should be on the sofa half the day, and drive out as often as she fancied the air might refresh her spirits: now, as these wishes of her husband appeared to coincide most exactly with her own, it did not seem at all worth while to attribute them to him alone, especially as he was doomed on other points to find *his* wishes singularly ineffective. They were gratified, however, this evening: Basil contrived to divert him on his own favourite topic; he told him of a negro clergyman to whom he had been introduced in London that summer; he spoke of his good sermon and pleasing mode of delivery; and from that

took occasion to tell several absurd anecdotes of negro wit which amused all the party.

What a pleasant evening it was; and with what devoted and unwinking admiration Dicky stared at their guest, till his mother ordered him to bed prematurely on the plea of Saturday night.

CHAP. X.

"Onde ha vita un pensier che mi conduce,
Con sua dolce favella,
A rimirar ciascuna cosa bella con più diletto."—DANTE.

ANOTHER beautiful day, and church bells ringing sweetly in the distance. Constance stood by the open window alone. Mrs. Podmore had taken her refractory catechumen out of the drawing-room to-day, knowing that they were liable to the presence of Mr. Hyde, and that this told unfavourably on Dicky's attention.

"You look as if you were steeped in sunshine to your very soul, Miss Felton," said Basil, coming up to the window.

"Do I? I am enjoying it excessively,—so are the robins; do you hear that merry fellow just beyond you?"

"Yes; it sounds like a thanksgiving to-day."

"I think the mere sense of life is enough to make one thankful sometimes."

"Ah! *some*times, not by any means always. Not *my* life at least," he added with a sigh; "that *sense* of life is at times little short of torture. By the way, did you ever notice what incessant use we make of that word sense in modern writing and speaking? sense of responsibility, sense of propriety, and the like. Now that seems to me the very mischief of our age, the preternatural consciousness of all that our ancestors did not notice, though no doubt they felt it in the way of

impulse, seldom turning back to grope for it in the dusky lanes of reflection."

"And yet, if we find that sort of consciousness wanting now, we accuse people of obtuseness, and find them doing or saying something *non*sensical."

"Well, perhaps we are now enduring the inevitable stage of progress from the unconsciousness of children to the perfect innocence and self-forgetting of angels; but certainly we are a long way off from either now."

"Yes, indeed we are," Constance answered with a smile, "and I am troubled now with a strong sense of idleness," for Mrs. Podmore came in just then to search for a book, and Basil, not perceiving this, replied, "*I* feel as idle as possible, but have no sense of lost time: however, I will come in and read so as not to make you lose yours."

"Here, then, is some reading I can safely recommend. Jerome has the highest opinion of the author," said Mrs. Podmore, handing to him, as he sat down, a bundle of highly figurative tracts against swearing, drinking, and Sabbath-breaking.

"Is it on the principle of vicarious suffering that I am to read these, or with the hope of equalising punishments that you wish me, who do not indulge in these sins, to undergo the discipline intended for those who do? I think you might select studies a little more apposite to my temptations. I will ask for them indeed, dear Mrs. Podmore, without any hesitation, when I *want* tracts to read. Oh, pray do not trouble yourself further."

"But this treatise on loss of time is, I assure you, *most* persuasive—rich in eloquence—it is as 'ointment poured out'—patience, Dicky! how dare you kick at the door, Sir?"

"I thought you weren't coming."

The door closed behind the belligerents, and Basil opened the treatise with a twitching of the mouth; but flung it down after a short inspection, saying to Constance, "This is the sort of good book I *detest*. Weak infusions of a text of Scripture embittered by the folly of an inefficient, twaddling writer: what a rascal I should have been if I had been dieted on such books! — that wretched Dicky!"

"You will be late for church," said Johanna, opening the door hastily, and shutting it with a slam.

At luncheon time the conversation was, as usual in a small country place, about the bad singing in church:— the nasal voices, and elaborate tunes that they sang out of time and out of tune: nothing at all new was said, yet Basil managed to give fresh piquancy to every old remark, and Constance found him charming still. When most people laugh aloud it is rather a disenchanting process; when he laughed, it seemed to bring no disturbance to his features, but only a new grace. It was perhaps for this reason that his mirth was so extremely exhilarating; no one looking at him was checked in their amusement by seeing a fine face look foolish and weak.

He did not accompany the family to afternoon service, but turned off in another direction for a walk, with a good-humoured bow and no kind of apology. It took Mrs. Podmore full ten minutes to embrace the idea that he actually was not coming, and Constance was half surprised and half vexed at his falling off.

As they came out of church, they fronted the sunset: the sun was just gone down (for the service was late in this hamlet), but against the pure bright light of the horizon the tracery of a few lonely trees stood out with

startling clearness. How beautiful it looked to Constance! how beautiful the thick bronze foliage under which they passed,—as yet unbrushed by the rough autumn winds! If Mr. Hyde felt as she did on looking at the peaceful sky, he had some excuse, she thought, for giving up a second church service; perhaps he was still gazing around on the hillside, breathless with devout admiration:—no, on their return he was found lounging over a book by the library fire, with Mrs. Podmore's spaniel on the chair opposite, dressed in a handkerchief, and wearing a neckcloth and cap: the likeness to Mr. Podmore must have struck every one.

"Trusty seemed to be chilly about the ears," he remarked without looking up, and turning his page with apparent interest.

The younger girls tittered, and their mother sent them upstairs at once, with a long throat-clearance ominous of future rebuke; and then, too indignant to speak composedly, she disengaged the sleepy dog from its trappings, and only muttered, "Really, Mr. Hyde! I wish for example's sake," upon which exordium Constance left the room, and never knew by what magic it was, that when she next saw them together, both were in the highest good-humour, and Mrs. Podmore actually asking Basil's opinion of the sermon they heard in the morning.

It was by a very slight exercise of diplomatic skill that he had turned the current of her thoughts. "Oh! my dear Madam, I serve my generation as a horrible example; we need bad boys, in life as well as in story-books, to show how far want of principle may go, and how dreadful are the consequences; let Dicky look at me and be warned. I have been reading a book that warns me, I'm sure, on many points, needless to mention

now, — don't be vexed about Trusty; dogs like warmth! What did you give for him? if I may ask — he is a curious variety of dog, quite unparalleled, I should think, among spaniels. Was he a very costly acquisition?"

Now the questioner well knew that the dog had been presented by a certain Lady Alicia Hammond, to whom Mrs. Podmore was pleased to refer whenever opportunity offered; at one time a near neighbour, whose expressive piety and stately presence and belongings had so thoroughly imbued her imagination, that even to this day everything connected with her ladyship was distinguished by respectful appreciation; the mongrel puppy sent to Clayfield Lodge shared the benefit of this; and now Mrs. Podmore enlarged upon Lady Alicia's kindness in not letting them have Trusty before he had got through the distemper, till the dressing-bell rang, and Basil had finished cutting the last chapter of his book.

But the dog was often a cause of discord between them, Basil holding the pampered wheezing little creature in abhorrence. A few evenings after this, Mrs. Podmore was singing "From Greenland's icy mountains," and Constance listening at her side, wondering why both hounds and humans are sometimes wont to throw up the head before they utter their most prolonged howls, when a titter among the young people interrupted, and Mrs. Podmore looked angrily through her spectacles at the group behind her: Basil sitting on a footstool with Trusty before him, and the girls laughing in shelter of handkerchiefs,—the dog's nose was tied round with bobbin, and on one side of its jaw bulging skin showed the site of an unswallowed piece of bread.

Mrs. Podmore was stifled with excitement, but Basil only explained his proceedings by saying that he concluded the dog must want a poultice for swelled gums,

if it could not eat a wholesome bit of bread. The dog and its mistress soon left the room, and half an hour later, the servant announced that Mrs. Podmore was gone to bed with a nervous headache, and wished to have the house kept very quiet.

After the rest of the party had retired, Mr. Podmore said something to Basil in gentle remonstrance about the extreme care due to delicate nerves and keen susceptibility, such as his poor wife suffered from; and he, in tones quite as serious and compassionate, asked if she knew that asafœtida and valerian were both considered sovereign remedies in nerve cases; his aunt knew the right proportion for a dose of either; he would write for the prescriptions to-morrow if Mrs. Podmore liked to try them; and so saying, wished his host good night, leaving poor Mr. Podmore so puzzled by his manner, that he was glad to turn his thoughts to Caffraria as quickly as he could.

CHAP. XI.

"L'amour est une chose fort intelligible que personne ne comprend. Ce n'est, certes, pas faute de parler de lui, d'écrire pour lui, de chanter sur lui; la parole, l'imprimerie et la musique n'ont été inventées que pour l'amour, et l'amour est encore le secret de l'univers." — *La Guerre du Nizam.*

THE Thursday after Basil's arrival at Clayfield Lodge was the day on which Constance had promised to write and tell her father the time fixed for her departure: the first moment she could speak to Mrs. Podmore alone, she mentioned Monday next as the term of her visit.

"Impossible, my dear! we *cannot* spare you then; I never dreamed of your being with us less than four or five weeks; besides, Tuesday is a great day here, it is James's birthday, and we always have a few friends to spend the evening with us on that day. I depended on your help then; you know my girls are so very retiring, they hardly say a word when we've company."

"I must not stay on such false pretences, dear Mrs. Podmore, for I am very little able to help either, and now I have been here almost three weeks,—quite a long visit."

"Nonsense, my dear; I cannot hear of your going yet, and you may tell your father so. You know, when you gave us such a shabby first visit, it was on condition of coming again for a much longer time this summer; so pray write and tell them that you stay another fortnight."

"Thank you for your kindness; I will say so, if you really wish me to do so," replied Constance, in tones more dubious than her feelings; for though she had begun to long for her mother's chat, her father's silence, and little Mary's glee, she had felt very loth to name the day for her return since Mr. Hyde had formed one of the party. As soon as Mrs. Podmore left the room, she sat down gaily to announce the intended put-off; but she was not long alone. Basil came into the room with an open book, and, throwing himself on a chair near her, said, "I hope I don't interrupt you, Miss Felton, but Podmore is in the library coughing, and really that is a convulsion of nature I am not fitted to witness; yet I almost wish that cough might come on next Sunday evening, and hinder our going into 'those benighted regions of Africa, hitherto unvisited by the saintly and self-devoted So-and-so.'" Both laughed, Constance with an uneasy conscience.

"I am sorry," she said, "to hear you laugh at missionary interests, because they are not matters for ridicule; are they?"

"No, but almost always for boring; at least, I have seldom been so fortunate as to hear them spoken of without an exhausting want of ability and fulness of ——"

"Folly?" interposed Constance, as he broke off abruptly.

"Why, in truth, missions have always seemed to me a subject particularly congenial to the taste of stupid people."

"Indeed! You have been unfortunate then; I wish you knew an uncle of mine who is as wise as he is good: he would answer you so well."

"And not shut me up with a misapplied text?"

"Never; he would understand your feelings, as he

does every one's, too much for that: he would give you full attention, and yet, I think, alter your opinion."

"I can believe it, for I fancy you might reform me a little yourself; but perhaps you hardly know all my provocations. You have been here about a fortnight, I think?"

"A fortnight to-morrow."

"And you were not making a long stay when I had first the pleasure of seeing you?"

"Oh no, only a week, while my father went on to London on business."

"Time for plenty of Hottentot conversions, I confess: but I am afraid I must be hindering you sadly; I will be quiet soon. Didn't I hear you advising us to read Dr. Chalmers' life? You see I *have* set off on the enterprise this morning: but tell me candidly, dear Miss Felton, did you recommend such a book because you really enjoyed reading it, or because, having got through it magnanimously yourself, you have an impulse, half triumph, half malignity, which urges you to see that some one else enters upon the same toils?"

"Oh, I should not have proposed such a book for your reading; it was Mr. James Podmore who I thought would like it."

"Thank you: he *is* a long-suffering spirit no doubt. How did you get on last night with his *un*broken catechism about the Ashenholt estate? rather hard work, was it not? I heard him setting you right with the utmost precision, if ever the wrong word slipped out,—it's as bad as writing a stiff grammar exercise to talk to these martyrs of accuracy. Ah! I see what you are going to say—'But he is so good.' Of course he is: did you ever find yourself heartily bored by any one who is *not* good? Bad people cannot form such unlimited no-

tions of patience and forbearance as these excellent bores do. Pray don't look reproachful; he is a *very* good fellow. Oh, Miss Podmore! I thought you were not to be seen this morning out of the schoolroom; have you done your sisterly endeavour with poor Miss Sarah's exercise?"

"No," said Johanna rather stiffly, "I am not wanted now upstairs, for Miss Stokes, our daily governess, is returned and begins her work again to-day."

"I'm glad of that," said Constance; "now we can see more of you. Won't you go with us to the Hillside well? Mr. Hyde has promised to show us all a new way to it through the Dingle."

"Quite out of the question for me to-day,—there is a poor woman dying in the Hurst Lane whom I must go and see directly we have done dinner;" and with these words she left the room. She had come in bent upon a long reading aloud, but seeing Basil's look of imperturbable comfort, she rightly judged that he would not be dislodged in a hurry, and went away; the promotion of sociable enjoyment never appeared to *her* a part of womanly duty.

"Extraordinary mortality among the poor people in these parts," muttered Basil. "I think I seldom asked Miss Podmore to do anything without being told that her time was already promised to some dying person."

"She is a most unwearied benefactor," replied Constance.

"Yes, but one does not like to wait for one's death to partake of such goodness. I should like a small share of her society while I wanted it and am in health; however, Mrs. Podmore will trust the girls to my leading, I dare say, with you for a chaperon. I think she is probably in the library now; so I will just go and secure that point."

The suspended pen of Constance was again at work, but in one moment he returned.

"Podmore had been having a nap over his book, I am sure, for he was looking so preternaturally intelligent over it when I went in,—Mrs. Podmore not there. Now please don't let me disturb the letter any longer; I will sit here in peace, if you do not object, till the bell rings."

A short interval of writing and reading followed, and then he looked up again to say, "I do not pretend that I am not a bore, Miss Felton, because I say bores must be better than I am to be thorough bores; there are all degrees of boring, and some of the mildest forms of it are the most difficult to deal with."

"Pray do not think your talking is in any degree a bore," said Constance, smiling, as he suddenly stopped short.

"Well, I was only going to mention the affectionate bores. It seems to me that the exact line of duty with regard to *these* is not yet clear to us; for the promptings of nature cannot be right when one longs to repulse them, and yet they are certain to misunderstand kindness, and, taking it for affection, to redouble their persecutions. If a new sect was to arise, which undertook to teach what it is right to do with such people, you may be sure that it would soon gather a vast multitude of adherents."

But here the discussion was arrested by Mrs. Podmore coming in to ask if Constance would take a drive with her after dinner. "I shall be *very* glad if you will," she said, "for I have to call upon that Mrs. James I told you of; and I feel so nervous to-day. I cannot go alone; Johanna has got cottage business of course."

Basil immediately put forward the claims of the

walking party, and was surprised and almost angry to hear Constance consent at once to the less agreeable plan.

"I will gladly accompany you," she replied; "you will not object to Sarah, and Hester, and Dicky walking to the Hillside well if Mr. Hyde takes care of them, will you?"

"Oh no, there is no objection to that, if he will be so kind."

He now felt himself obliged to be so kind in act, but his good-humour was gone.

People whose good-humour generally gives to their gravest intentions a touch of gaiety and *enjouement*, are particularly transparent in their moments of ill-humour, and the dryness of their tones *then* lacks the respectable covering that calm-mannered dulness may always secure. Perhaps nothing tended so much to mislead Constance as the sudden fits of chagrin which Basil allowed himself to show: used to the utmost self-control herself, she was so ignorant of the world as to measure the intensity of feeling in other people by the vehemence with which it was expressed; and taking for granted that the same barriers were opposed to their impatience, which generally kept her own in check, she was apt, as in this instance, to believe emotion profound, when it was only undisciplined.

To her the sacrifice of the walk was quite as annoying as to him, but he showed his annoyance, and in her simplicity she thought, "How much he must have reckoned on this walk!" He *had* confidently depended on having his own way, and decidedly preferred her society.

"That Mrs. James" had once been a great favourite of Mrs. Podmore's; she now told Constance, as they drove along, that she disliked going to see her above all

things. The explanation was simple. When first introduced to the new neighbour, Mrs. Podmore had told her cursorily how much her nerves were affected, and Mrs. James had expressed polite concern. On first acquaintance Mrs. James seemed gifted with a great deal of condoling sympathy, and soon Mrs. Podmore poured out her troubles; Mrs. James listened, and now and then suggested comfortable views of her case; in refusing these Mrs. Podmore took occasion to speak of herself incessantly for nearly an hour. This style of intercourse went on for a little while longer, till by degrees poor Mrs. James always got some work close by her if she saw the Podmores' carriage pass by, and when it had stopped at her door would gently pass her needle to and fro while her visitor, always alone when making these new demands upon sympathy, proceeded with the monotonous details of chagrined egotism.

At last one day Mrs. James rose suddenly to stir the fire just as Mrs. Podmore entered upon the third quarter of her hour's harangue,—an act that did not escape notice; and a few days afterwards (really too soon for so great a drain upon patience), no sooner had Mrs. Podmore begun with her usual "I *can* tell *you* these things, dear Mrs. James, for I find you one of the *few* who can understand and feel for me," than Mrs. James, with the mask of pity nearly falling off, replied, "Indeed I am sorry that you suffer so much, but—pray excuse me for saying so—I have really known too much of heavy affliction to feel the compassion you might expect for many of the troubles you speak of; for instance," she added, rather embarrassed by her own honesty, "may I beg you to read this paper? I know the facts to be perfectly true, rather understated than oversaid. Dear Mrs. Podmore, with such terrible need

as this in my thoughts, I fear that my sense of *your* deprivations is necessarily blunted."

After this Mrs. Podmore seldom entered the gates of the too sensible widow, and spoke of her as "far from agreeable when one came to know her *well*;" and indeed, when people are only visited for their sympathy, they must naturally lose their powers of pleasing, as forced pity becomes more and more jaded.

Constance listened to recitals of a good many wrongs both in going and returning; but, while her ears listened, her mind slid off from the barren ground on which attention had been fettered, to bask in some sheltered nook of contemplation. Her thoughts left unnoticed what was going on close by, and doted on the loveliness of nature: she watched the soft fleece parted by balmy winds above; the trees, to which autumn tints were giving a kind of distinct personality; the yellow leaves showering noiselessly to the ground, through sunlight which gave a glory to every decaying tissue; the placid cows standing in the deep green fields of that bright summerlike October. She was sorry for Mrs. Podmore, but very happy in herself.

That evening, after tea, she noticed that Mr. Hyde took up the "Monthly Record of Missions," and read without yawning for half an hour; he put a marker in it also—rather ostentatiously, considering that Mr. Podmore was out of sight behind a newspaper at the other end of the room, and only herself and the younger ones sitting at work round the table.

CHAP. XII.

"But his continual voice was pleasanter
To her than noise of trees or hidden rill."—KEATS.

CONSTANCE might have suspected the gradual alteration of her feelings with regard to Basil, from the distinct perception she now had of the manner in which every moment of time was passed when they were together; each little interval that she was in the same room with him seemed to have importance; if he left it, there was a sensible blank; when he returned, decided pleasure. She did begin to suspect herself, and her manner became less friendly—less glad; she was more at ease with James Podmore. She puzzled Basil, who was more and more occupied with her, though still not so *sure* of his feelings as to say, even to himself, that he would go further. He had not learned the effect of retirement upon a woman's nature; the apprehensive delicacy it induces he had no idea of; it never occurred to him that, because he was a rich man, Constance would be peculiarly sensitive about giving him the slightest encouragement, or that the more she cared for his admiration, the less concern she would show; it never entered into his imagination that a studied indifference of manner is often the veil instinctively assumed by a great wish to please;—he was too wayward and self-indulgent to understand self-restraint, and though he thought at times that he *had* some hold on her imagination, he was never sure of it two days together. Not that he was

diffident, (*he* could not have said with the first Lord Shaftesbury, "My love to her gave me that desire to seem excellent that I could say nothing,"*) but because his own character supplied no key to the mainsprings of hers—submission and self-control.

She, too, carried her prudence and shy reserve to an unnecessary length: the influence of her father's silent but emphatic horror of any approach to flirting, often made her position in society painful from absurd scruples. To give an example: she was one day talking with Basil about the pale complexion of a lady very much admired in that neighbourhood, and she said, "I never before thought that a very pale person could be so perfectly beautiful."

"Yet I find colourless flowers are the sweetest," replied Basil, "and pale features sometimes lovelier and far more taking than rosy beauty."

He looked at her while saying this, and so evidently left his metaphor behind in the stress he mentally laid upon the thing figured, that she could not miss the little heart compliment, and her manner changed at once to the defensive rigidity of guarded politeness.

Could the most penetrating observer have detected the cause of this? Basil wondered, and felt it a very disagreeable change; all her pleasant frankness seemed to go off into awkward constraint. The truth was, she was feeling so ashamed of herself (educational influences made her feel so whenever she was conscious of pleasing greatly), that she could only think, "Have I been talking foolishly? would not papa be vexed with me now?" Yet, behind the stiff manner into which she withdrew, she tasted a lively joy.

* Memoirs and Letters of Anthony, first Earl of Shaftesbury.

It was James Podmore's birthday, and at breakfast-time his mother told Basil that they should drink tea rather early, as some guests were expected about five o'clock; to which he carelessly replied, "That being the case, perhaps I may be excused coming in for dinner. The day is so beautiful, and I have been so idle about shooting hitherto, that to-day I meant to have a long round; you won't go with me, I suppose, Podmore?" he added, addressing James.

"No, I thank you."

"The usual business at the Clayfield Bank, eh?"

"No, I stay at home to-day for a holiday treat." Basil jerked back his hair with the gesture habitual to him when annoyed: what reason had Miss Felton to look pleased when the solemn James spoke of spending a whole day with her? Pshaw! what did it matter to him!—if she was icy, he would not think twice about it; and so thinking he left the room, and in five minutes passed by the window whistling to his dog, and shouting out to Dicky that he must make haste and follow him, for he could not wait.

He little knew what was passing in the mind of Constance; her anticipations of the weariness of that day were all fulfilled. James Podmore gave himself up to being amiable; he chose to occupy the drawing-room, in order, he said, to avoid any temptation to business in the library. He read, but in a way that made Constance feel all the time that he was attending much less to his book than to what passed around him; and if she escaped out to the lawn for a few minutes, he followed, and with his hands behind him paced up and down beside her still. With a good-natured wish to make his holiday pleasant, she put no voluntary check on the conversation for which he was

inclined; but she found it difficult: his mere presence seemed to deprive her of any buoyancy, and though the few opinions he broached were most contrary to her notions, she felt powerless to combat them, and, scorning herself for the cowardice of tacit assent, felt still more angry with him for thus paralysing her. It was quite a relief when Johanna and Dr. Chalmers made a diversion; but why should James stay to listen?

Mrs. Podmore had the virtue of thorough old-fashioned hospitality: whenever she felt equal to the exertion, it was her greatest delight to receive friends. The neighbourhood of Clayfield Lodge was not rich in people of her way of thinking, yet a few families after her own heart were within reach, and on rare occasions, such as this birthday, several banking acquaintances from the town of Clayfield were also invited. For the entertainment of these, Basil Hyde, as an accomplished man of the world, was considered an invaluable help. "I trust he will be back in good time!" was an expression frequently heard during that long, tedious day. But the guests were all arrived before Basil or Dicky made their appearance, and Mrs. Podmore's exhilaration was a little damped by her displeasure.

Constance looked at her anxiously as the clock struck six, and wished that the culprit might be waited for no longer. Conversation flagged; the few subjects fit for especial notice were resorted to, almost without exception, by every talker present; she heard these favourite topics travelling round the room like a storm,—when one person had done with the weather, the new carriage, and the eloquent missionary, and was branching off in sudden energy to the latest news from Paris, some one by the fire-place began again about the missionary, the pair in the window exclaimed at the unusual heat, and

a shy girl reproduced the question, "How do you like your new carriage, Miss Podmore?"—all apparently unconscious of the use so lately made of the same words, or else desperately driven to hold the same ground, undaunted by its pre-occupation.

The only person who seemed fluent in conversation was a crisp-looking old gentleman who sat by his hostess, and continued talking of nothings in a very impressive tone, politely unconscious of her vexed glances towards the clock. Several elderly ladies had joined the party, richly dressed, but loaded with all those incongruous ornaments that leave the ugly as ugly, and the oddities as odd, as they were before the utmost costly finery can do had been tried upon them.

As they sat opposite her, Mrs. Podmore fancied she detected them in looking at the clock too, and bridling with astonishment at the delay; and thereupon the bell was rung, and the assembled guests soon marshalled in to a serious tea.

Not till it was nearly over could the servants bring word that "Mr. Hyde and the young gentleman were coming in:" not till after another long hour did Basil appear in the drawing-room, as gay and unconcerned as if no one had expected him sooner. He made a slight excuse gracefully to Mrs. Podmore, with regrets that a hungry man could not recruit himself in less than half an hour, and added that it was no use to send Dicky to bed as she had ordered, by way of punishment, because a sleepy boy was more punished and punishing to his misleader in the drawing-room, than a happy fellow at rest on his pillow, and so they had dined together, and he had brought him in as a partner in disgrace. It was no use for the mother to frown; for while poor Dicky slunk behind her, looking very stiff in his Sunday

jacket, Basil went on talking so agreeably that the company seemed to brighten at once. A French writer only can express in one sentence the instantaneous relief thus afforded: "Toutes subissaient bientôt le charme de son effusion."

Constance looked very dreamy and dull when he entered; after laudable exertions during tea-time, she had been sitting ever since in irksome silence, wishing to promote conversation, but vainly racking her mind for something to say. She noticed enviously that even James Podmore was now talking eagerly,—talking of politics, and, as Englishmen are wont to do, speaking as if intimately acquainted with the prime minister, because he was with his political principles.

Beside her was a young girl too much fettered with nervousness to break the thrall of a loquacious informant, and she kept on saying "oh, very!" "yes, indeed!" "really!" without adding any fresh materials of interest. Mr. Podmore stood by on the other side, talking to an elderly lady who was so timid and so excessively conscientious that as soon as she had advanced any little fact she became startled if her companion drew a conclusion from the statement, and said she *hoped* she was not mistaken, but she should be very sorry to misrepresent the circumstance.

There was not much amusement in listening to all this, and at last Constance gave way to her besetting inclination for reverie. It was not till after there had been a silence for listening to music and songs that the group in her corner was broken up, and Basil found a place beside her, saying *sotto voce* with a sigh, "I feel so utterly dejected by the exceeding ugliness opposite that I really must come here to recover my spirits. Ah! I know what your reproving silence would in-

sinuate; you mean to say 'Look at home, and remember your own glass walls;' but, Miss Felton, you must allow that I do not heighten the effect of my facial irregularities with an orange-coloured neckcloth; I have *some* mercy."

"You should lend poor Mrs. Hunt your 'Chevreuil on Colours.'"

"What! to induce her to try rose-colour because her hair is such an intense black?"

"She did not make herself," said Constance with an apologetic tone of remonstrance.

"Oh! she *would* have done so without compunction; depend upon it, the person who could consummate her uncomeliness with such a cap as that would have made herself as ugly, and uglier too if it was possible."

"You are very hard upon her, Mr. Hyde; if you knew how actively good she is, you would not dislike her face so much."

"Pardon me—but come! my peccadilloes shall not lead us into a quarrel: let us hope in common charity that the good woman is as little given to self-knowledge as most of us;—curious enough, though, that excellent people have such a tendency to make themselves hideous! If they were always before a looking-glass, one could understand it as a kind of self-denial; but how people who *have* learned their duty to their neighbour can—oh! Miss Felton—that cap has brought on quite a nervous seizure; do, pray, for pity's sake, say something pleasant; say you will come and see us this autumn, or that Mrs. Hunt's physician will insist upon her leaving England before I come down here again,—anything just to help me through the evening. Singing again! will no sore throat ever affect Miss Hudson!"

Constance never could carry on a bantering style of

conversation, and she smiled gravely, feeling vexed with his sarcastic tone: for though she was amused by it, and a little gratified by the splenetic complaint being made to *her*, she did not like to feel an accomplice in anything so rude and unkind as ridicule — especially ridicule of those who were present. After a pause for Miss Hudson's song, he began again in the same captious vein: "It makes me feel impatient to see so many faces on the strain to listen, like those of cats by a mouse-hole; some of the party — the Podmores, for instance — positively dislike music, I know, and dislike still more being interrupted while talking. Do you know who those brightly dressed ladies on the ottoman are?"

"No, I could not catch their names when they came in."

"Well, I can fancy either of them James Podmore's godmamma; they look like the old fairy godmothers who brought all the rich presents to children in fairy tales. If they endowed him with their own specialities, it's no wonder he looks so — sagacious, — and not exactly *spirituel*."

Constance wished to say something kind about him, but, hesitating to mention his real goodness, she turned the subject by an abrupt inquiry as to Basil's day's sport. Basil laughed. "Very fair, thank you, but your subtleties are transparent, Miss Felton: I *know* you wanted to check my personal remarks. Yet do tell me, are you never provoked by stupid people?"

"Very often."

"And don't they *exasperate* you? is not dealing with them like trying to write with a pencil that is too blunt to mark?"

"Really, Mr. Hyde, one would imagine you think it hardly worth while for dull people to be kept alive; you

would fain get rid of them all, and leave the world to the wise and clever only."

"I don't deny that I have entertained that idea, and if I was the manager of human affairs, I might be tempted to carry it out; for only see the perpetual miseries, mistakes, and absurdities caused and committed by merely stupid people; see how they thwart good and provoke evil, and blunder about everything short of self-preservation — hardly securing that either! It seems to me quite an oversight of Providence that such people are allowed in the world; *all* they effect is failure. Of course I speak rather at random, and I am afraid I shock you, but I hoped you understood me well enough to make necessary deductions."

"I was thinking that *their* failure, supposing it as great as you say, is not nearly so lamentable as that of clever people who, with great powers, do wrong, and live irreligiously."

Basil sighed, and said, after a pause, "Ah, yes! you are right; but you must remember we can only measure the degree of failure on earth for *this* world's purposes; the enormous loss of future good cannot be estimated by us yet."

"But believed in," Constance replied; and then, fearing that her tone was too didactic, she added, "I quite feel the provocation of very stupid people; but perhaps pride keeps me from complaint, when I remember some French moralist's observation, that the very wise have more patience with 'les sots' than the half-wise."

"Then I am afraid I have no pretensions to wisdom. Supper announced! Now I am going to do voluntary penance, and sit opposite the cap, and between the fairy godmothers: will you forgive me if I thus prove my contrition?"

CHAP. XIII.

"All our thoughts are gay and golden,
While the sun of hope they shroud;
Those bright beams no more beholden,
Turn again to watery cloud."

MRS. HENRY COLERIDGE, *Phantasmion.*

THE next morning Constance was made happy by a letter from her father — a rare pleasure — giving her full permission to prolong her stay at Clayfield Lodge: as she closed it and looked up, she saw that Basil was reading his letters with a troubled expression on his face. He walked to the window before the rest of the party rose from breakfast, and, after a minute or two, came back and said, "I am afraid I must leave you, Mrs. Podmore, as suddenly as I came. I am *very* sorry to do so; but I hear from my aunt that Elinor is taken very ill at Eastbourne, and she is anxious and uncomfortable — in fact they want me, and I must not lose a day in getting there."

A gentle clamour of regrets, and some opposition and remonstrance at his being too easily alarmed from Mrs. Podmore, were ineffectual, and he repeated firmly, "I must be off at half-past eleven; there is a twelve o'clock train, I think, from Clayfield Station?" — and while he and Mr. Podmore were in consultation over Bradshaw, the family dispersed, and Constance went into the drawing-room.

"Going! and so soon! — and no chance of see-

ing him again for months and months, unless ——"
She sat with work in her hand, listening for his step: every one in the house seemed to be scampering up and down stairs. No one came in till about eleven, when Sarah and Dicky burst open the door in quest of an Atlas that lived behind the sofa: they stayed at first merely to dawdle out of the school-room, and then to dispute about the ownership of some coloured prints that were found crumpled up under the map-book.

While they were wrangling Basil came in.

"Sarah," he said, "will you do me a kindness?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Hyde, and thank you for correcting my French exercise before breakfast; I got a good mark for it to-day!"

"Well, I want my glove mended; you will find it on the hall table. Take it up to your governess, and ask her to show you how to manage it, for it's a bad sort of hole, and say that I will ask mamma for a half-holiday if it hinders lessons long."

Sarah flew off delighted.

"Now, Dicky, I constitute you my heir-at-law for any effects I leave behind; run quick up to Williams, and tell him you are to have that scent-bottle you pushed the cork into, and my clasp-knife that you notched. Make haste, you monkey, or they'll be put up; and if you like you can stop and see how Williams packs the gun-case."

And so he obtained a brief interval alone with Constance; each minute seemed fateful to her. She went on working, and said in a very quiet voice, "I am sorry you are going."

"I'm *very* sorry," he replied; "I would not go away now for a great deal if I could help it; but my cousin is *so* delicate. My aunt writes in great distress; she

depends entirely upon my instant return. I trust she is needlessly alarmed, but I cannot leave them to themselves at such a time; lodgings are so different from home. I wish you knew Elinor! if you had seen her, you would understand my anxiety.'

"Oh! I do quite," answered Constance, though just then it was what she most wanted to understand.

"Are you going to be here much longer, Miss Felton?"

"Ten days."

"I asked because ——" The sentence could not be finished, for Mr. and Mrs. Podmore joined them, she urgent for sandwiches to be taken; he mildly impressive about the closed carriage being better than the dog-cart, for the weather had changed, and it was cold; and while he refused, others of the family came in with kind words and offered help, and heartfelt expressions of sorrow at losing the rest of his visit. Poor Constance, alone, sat silent and unhelping; she felt as if she *must* say something to him more than *good-bye*. The hand of the clock was close upon the half-hour, and he stood close beside her; but Hester and James sat down opposite them, and *would* occupy both eye and ear till Basil began to shake hands.

At that moment their spirits were as near and as intimately related to each other, as if all the world had owned them to be lovers; but because of the world, they stood in the relation of polite acquaintances only: Constance shook hands with a distant air, and he said "good-bye" with a degree of formality that left no thread of *fact* on which to join a gossiping theory of mutual attachment. And he was gone — happy Dicky allowed to accompany him to the station. Constance wished for solitude just then too much to dare to seek it, and after a few minutes the leave-taking commotion

subsided, and Johanna settled down for "a good long reading aloud." This was welcome to Constance, insomuch as it was less importunate for attention than talking; but it was sadly worrying too to hear an inflexible voice drone on beside her, while the inner ear longed to listen again and again to other words with well-remembered accents.

It was a windy, threatening kind of day, though the sun glared out from time to time with a strong and unfeeling brightness; all the chimneys tried to smoke, some of them with stifling success; and even when the opening and shutting of windows and outer doors was at an end, there was no physical peace; the wind kept up a constant agitation of unexpected noises, and as soon as the house seemed quiet again it rattled some window-sash, or made a low pushing sound at one of the doors; and meanwhile Basil was on his way to the interesting cousin.

About five o'clock Constance strayed into the empty dining-room. How could all the furniture look so utterly the same as it looked on happy afternoons when games of battledore and shuttlecock went on there, and the same sunsetting light brought them all to the west window, and Basil's manner sank from fun to thoughtfulness;—and there on the mantelpiece lay the twist of paper-lighters that he had twirled up to make spectacles for Trusty the morning before, to the extreme delight of the young ones. Every little object has its sting when a recent departure has made a desolate blank; the quivering spot of sunlight which she saw on the wall as she went slowly upstairs, the peaceful play of sunbeams on a russet elm tree opposite, made her heart writhe with remembrance: she had seen them day after day when running up to her room, after pleasant hours,

to prepare for the merry tea-time. But she would not dwell on the contrast till night; she would have time then for reflection, and freedom from eyes. Night came, and with it repentance; she had been very foolish and very wrong—allowing herself to dream of improbable happiness: how unlikely it seemed, now he was gone, that a person so much in the world, so much older and cleverer than herself, and so generally sought after, should really care for an insignificant creature like her! Men thought little of expressing a passing fancy, she knew, and Mr. Hyde's could not be more than that. And then this Elinor whom he alluded to so often, and with such tenderness,—a cousin indeed, but cousins could love; perhaps they had had a little misunderstanding which induced him in one of his wayward moods to leave her, and try and please himself better elsewhere—he was capricious, beyond doubt—and then she had made herself ill with fretting, and he was recalled for a reconciliation;—ah! that was it, most likely, and he would quite forget *her* when again with Elinor. If it were not so, even if he *did* care for her, he was not the sort of person she ought to love; neither her father nor her dear uncle Graham would approve of him; he was so satirical, and found fault with everything just as the mood took him. So she thought, for characters, like hills, are most clear in outline when seen from a little distance. Mr. Hyde's faults were more conspicuous now, though the charm he exercised was as great as ever. And now she repented deeply of the hours spent in a ceaseless desire to please him; it was sinning against her scrupulous conscience to *seek* the love or praise of any stranger: but even while full of contrition for this, if she chanced to recall some little happy stroke by which she had touched his fancy or roused his energy,

what a flash of joy entered her heart! what sudden light stole over her face! — her face bent down in humble prayer; her heart, a few moments before, lifted up to the Most High, with an apprehensive cry for help against besetting sin!

Oh! the reveries, the recollections, the anticipations of a heart in this state! What verdict do we pronounce upon such a state? If he *does* love her, as she has now and then reason to believe, it is but true love, faithful to its object; if not, which seems equally possible, — oh, then it is what the world would call it — folly; — what her prayers call it — vanity: at all events, it is a lamentable mistake. The vague doubt, however, may occur to us which helped not a little to soothe her, that, after all, what the *event* only can decide upon and prove to be either womanly affection or unmaidenly silliness, *may* not be a sin in the sight of an Omniscient Judge.

CHAP. XIV.

"Doch drängt auch nur von ferne
Dein Ton zu mir sich her,
Behorch' ich ihn so gerne,
Vergess' ich ihn so schwer!"—PLATEN.

THE next day was windy and wet; the whole household a little out of sorts with incipient colds and general flatness; Johanna too hoarse for reading aloud; her mother too unwell for scolding. Constance did her best to enliven them; no easy process with a heavy heart, but she felt really grateful for Mrs. Podmore's affection, and was glad when occasion offered to render her any service. How often, when love is impossible, it is a relief to be able to show kindness!

In the course of the morning Mr. Podmore came in to ask his wife how she was: "Very unequal to exertion, and vexed to remember that they had forgotten to beg Mr. Hyde to write and say how he found his cousin;" she wished he would write and ask him to-day. For once Mr. Podmore ventured to offer an opinion contrary to hers,—it was too soon, he thought, to tease him with inquiries. Mrs. Podmore made a gesture expressive of her inability to contest the point, and he retired as noiselessly as he could.

Seeing her eyes closed for some time afterwards, Constance took up the book she had longed to begin: it was one that Basil had spoken of with delight—Macaulay's

Essays; and she had only that morning discovered it on one of the highest book-shelves. She read with pleased attention; every fine passage seemed to her to have been written by Basil, so much did his praise identify his sentiments with those of the writer. Presently she saw Mrs. Podmore rise from the sofa and go across the room with a step heavy from self-consideration; it said as plainly as words could say, "I am very *much* out of health, and if no one else can spare my feelings I must care for them myself."

"My dear Constance," she said, slowly sinking into a chair before the Davonport, "have you any message to Miss Hyde? I shall have no rest till I inquire about her niece."

"Oh, pray remember me kindly to her. I hope Miss Lee will soon recover."

"Inflammation in the chest, I imagine — and a poor constitution," she replied, beginning to write.

Mrs. Podmore was mistaken; Elinor had only a bad cold, but she was the darling of the family, and her father's only child: if her finger ached there was anxiety in her own home, and real concern at the Hydes'. Basil found her better when he reached Eastbourne; he found that, in spite of his infirm health, General Lee had hastened thither also. Two days later the old man insisted on taking her back to London for fresh advice, promising that when she regained strength she should finish her allotted time with Miss Hyde: the air near Dorking always agreed with her. So the Hydes returned home, and looked forward to November when Elinor might be well enough to rejoin them.

People say sometimes "So-and-so cannot care for him," because she was joining in the laugh against him, or even beginning it: a *because* which deeper knowledge

of human nature would interpret differently. So much do we long to bring into mention the name that most interests the heart, that *any* opportunity for doing so will be seized or made, even when it can only be done safely by the help of ridicule or blame. Soon after they were together, Basil Hyde remarked to his aunt that Miss Felton had sometimes the most abrupt manner that he had ever met with; and Constance laughed with the Podmores at a little impatient gesture habitual to him when annoyed—a quick toss of his finely shaped head, which lifted the hair from his brow, and could not fail to caution all who saw it of his growing impatience. She was now a fast friend to Sarah and Dicky, the two who had most constantly enjoyed Basil's good-natured attention; and whenever there was any fair pretext she would get them to say what they had done with him,—what he had said,—what he seemed most to like, &c. &c. She had a ridiculous sort of pleasure too in taking up the clasp-knife he gave Dicky, and a touch of self-contempt followed on this poor pleasure.

The week came slowly to an end, but the next began with a thorough wet day, and there were so many colds and coughs in the house that few went to church. Sundays are called, by poets and devout people and writers on religious subjects, the most blessed and peaceful days in Christian life; they are so under certain conditions, but these are as insecure as the virtue and wisdom of man. Rest from secular occupation leaves time for the exercise of our highest powers, and, alas! for the tyranny of our meanest foibles also. The melancholy, the passion-storm, the petulance, and frivolity of the human heart may desecrate many of our sabbath hours without any external breach of religious observance; and if these come not between us and our

soul's hallowed rest, a well-known household foe is ever ready to intrude. I speak in a whisper here, for I allude to an old acquaintance, — to Dulness; despotic in so many families, oppressive in its sway; how heavy are the thrusts with which it casts down the sensitive to the lowest holds of dejection!

Constance sat weary and mind-hungry through the long evening which began at five on that wet Sunday. For the first hour after tea, Mr. Podmore read aloud a loose paraphrase of part of the book of Job; so far so well — or so ill, according to the taste of the hearer; but he added to this his own paraphrase, weaker, wordier, with more copious explanations of meanings perfectly explicit in the sacred text: to listen to this after the other, was a test of patience indeed; but he *was* too hoarse to go on beyond another half-hour.

Reading to themselves was not the fashion in his family, rarely music, and then not such as is asked for again; but guileless *ennui* reigned supreme, and slept or yawned, or prompted needless remarks, slow jests, and slower ejaculations, on nearly every chair that was occupied. Constance was angry with herself for acrimonious thoughts; she wondered where the fault lay, whether stupidity was a fault or a disease, since it had the consequences and inveteracy of both, or whether a nature like hers, with its craving for vivid life, was but a monstrosity, and those of sad jokers the wholesome type of humanity; and then, in spite of her resolves, she thought of Basil: — she felt anew his intense, profound vitality; his quick glance that asked and answered so much; his silence that was such complete repose — the repose of entire abstraction; his conversation that elicited powers which, though not half equal to all that he required, were yet greater than she was ever conscious

of when conversing with anybody else. Ah! what tears were on her cheek that Sunday night, and what prayers rose to heaven while they fell! And then came sleep as sweet as if those prayers must be fulfilled according to her desire rather than her eternal weal. "This day week I shall be at home," was her happiest thought on awaking, but she did not know what that morning's post would bring: a letter from Miss Hyde in reply to Mrs. Podmore's kind inquiries, and a note enclosed to Constance inviting her to Burnham, with so much cordiality and grace, that refusal would have been difficult even to one disinclined to go.

"I lose no time in asking you," Miss Hyde wrote, "as I understand you are going to leave Clayfield Lodge next week; pray give us the pleasure of receiving you for at least a fortnight. If you want an excuse at home, you must tell Mr. Felton of the cold which Mrs. Podmore mentioned, and say that you will try change of air before you return, and not take back pale cheeks to make him anxious. You know we are not so very far off for *railway* distance; only two hours from Clayfield to our nearest station: our carriage shall meet you there. Pray say you will come."

The process which led to the invitation was this. Mrs. Podmore's letter being forwarded from Eastbourne, reached Burnham on the previous Saturday; in it she alluded several times to the great amiability of "dear Constance Felton," for she knew Miss Hyde took a warm interest in the child of her favourite schoolfellow. Having read the letter, Miss Hyde began to speak of Constance with admiring pleasure: "She *must* be amiable indeed—as sweet-tempered as she looks—to remain in poor Mrs. Podmore's good graces so long."

Years ago Basil had often heard his aunt speak of

Constance with the sort of deafened attention which gentlemen are apt to give when ladies speak of their lady friends (indifference being naturally caused by wholesale praise, or sweeping condemnation); he had heard her going on about "that sweet Miss Felton," with his eye glancing over newspapers near him, and his voice only exerted for little unsyllabled sounds of inevitable politeness; just as he had heard her frequent lamentations over "that selfish Mrs. Podmore"—it was a burden and nothing more. Now, however, he listened in good earnest to every word connected with Constance, and on his aunt's observing, "I am sorry Mrs. Podmore thinks her looking so pale," he said carelessly, "Pale! yes, she will be downright ill, if old Podmore goes on boring her with his lectures much longer. I'm sure it's poison to her, poor girl; and if she goes home as she is, they will never let her make a visit alone again. Down, sir! you shall have a bone, if you beg for it properly. I say, aunt, this carpet was never swept to-day; here's the nut I threw at Shag last night,—but what were we talking about? Oh! Miss Felton—well, why not ask her to come here for a bit? it would be rest from Hottentots, at least."

Miss Hyde had never heard him propose such a thing in his life, and it was well that the fact of the nut, and the intention of a grave remonstrance with her housemaids, a little broke the surprise she felt by another turn of thought.

"But, my dear Basil, your cousin may come on the 13th, and we don't like anything to disturb our happiness with dear Elinor."

"Of course not, but it would be no bore to either party; young ladies make the best company for each other, and really I think Elinor will like her. She's a

very nice girl, aunt, and requires a little amusement after hearing Podmore cough over his African letters so long; and what she endured from James Podmore I can't describe: 'tout ce qui va sans dire,' he was determined to say out fully; when once he began to speak, he would not spare a syllable; and so poor Miss Felton, with a visitor's amiable desire to be interested, used to feel herself obliged to sit motionless with attention, while he propounded and exemplified his inexhaustible truisms. Poor girl! how I used to pity her for being so civil! she could not use my stopper of 'Yes, yes; so you told me before.'"

"Well," replied his aunt, "if you think it will do, it will give me very *great* pleasure to get her here. I will write to-day and try. I shall not scruple, you know, to put her into the smaller room; Elinor always likes the sofa in the best-room window."

Basil assented gaily, and she left the room thinking "How fond he is of Elinor! he always brightens up when she is mentioned."

Thus the invitation was decided upon, Constance little guessing how it came about. Although her society had been thus desired, she was sensible throughout the ensuing visit that the most important consideration with the Hydes was not how she liked Elinor, but how Elinor liked her.

Mrs. Podmore, to whom she showed the note, said a good deal about its being "very gratifying," and Johanna, who stood by the window looking reproachfully sad, turned round when the others left the dining-room, and muttered, "*What* a happy creature you are!"

"Happy? am I?" replied Constance, just then a little bewildered — divided between the delight of being asked to Burnham, and the fear that her father would

say she had been away from home long enough as it was,—and unusually blind to the expression of her companion's face.

"Pretty people are sure to have this world's sunshine, I suppose," Johanna went on.

"But *I* am not pretty, Johanna! I always thought I had such a plain sickly look;" for Constance painfully felt the want of beauty, and sometimes slipped into the unconscious insincerity of a little overstating her opinion of this want, with the hope that from so large an assertion some considerable deductions *must* be made, and that she might be soothed by hearing these.

But Johanna was in no mood for soothing, and only said, "I don't know what *you* call pretty, but if every one admires you, it comes to the same thing." With these words she left the room.

Certainly at *that* moment poor Constance might have justified the remark; thick black eyelashes shaded the soft eyes which looked down in modest perplexity, and a slight flush made the delicate outlines of her face more striking. She was pained by Johanna's tone, but pleasure had been conveyed to her mind. "*Did* any one, did *he* then admire her?"

She had sat over her desk for half an hour before an answer to Miss Hyde was composed; three half-written notes on the best letter-paper she had, attested to the difficulty that she found in this simple business: at last, giving up the attempt to write such an answer as she would *like* to send, she confined herself to the plainest expressions she could use; and if one says just what has to be said and nothing more, it eases the task wonderfully. So she thanked Miss Hyde for her kind invitation,—said it would delight her to come if she might—that she was writing home to ask, and would beg her

father to send a line to Miss Hyde, as well as herself, in reply, so that no time should be lost in letting her know; — she hoped she might come, and on Friday next, as Miss Hyde proposed; and if she did, would leave Clayfield station at such an hour ——

After this letter and one to her father were written, she had time to rejoice secretly in her own delicious anticipations.

CHAP. XV.

"Un seul jour est toute une vie pour le cœur, et j'en ai plusieurs à passer près de lui."—*Histoire de la Vie de Madame de Bonneval.*

BEFORE Constance could receive the answer from home, which sanctioned her acceptance of Miss Hyde's invitation, she had begun to doubt whether she really wished to go; whether the delight of being with the Hydes would compensate for the misery of being overcome with nervousness on first getting to a new place. Already she trembled with excitement, already wished that Friday was not quite so near; and when Mr. Felton's letter came, she hardly knew whether she was glad or sorry. The peace of home appeared so blissful to the fluttering heart, and all the sweet uncertainties of Burnham so full of perils to her weakness.

But Friday came, and all the good-byes of Clayfield Lodge were over except Mr. Podmore's, who took her to the station, and, in his affectionate interest for her soul's health, improved the opportunity of their drive with talk of a religious nature: it was a comfort to her then; she was internally shaken with many conflicting emotions, and to hear his mild monotonous voice gently insisting upon the unalterable decrees of Heaven, and the utter helplessness of man, was more consolatory than he imagined. She always liked talking with him in a *tête-à-tête*, for then she felt his real elevation of soul: — no longer restrained by natural diffidence, he would

then speak of the spirit's most intimate need so humbly and devoutly, that his want of a less needful wisdom was lost sight of, and the saintliness of his inner life perceived. In the presence of several people he would dilate on the destitution of other souls, especially those of the unawakened heathen; but when alone with a sincerely religious person, he dwelt feelingly upon his own experimental anxieties. Had he often conversed thus with Constance, his influence with her might have been very great, for she was of an age to listen eagerly to the convictions of any earnest spirit; but this influence was lost by the narrowness of mind which he exhibited in the general tenor of his conversation, and his appeals for Christian sympathy too often found her heart cold and regardless;—not that she was insensible to the miseries of the heathen, but because her imagination *could* not get sight of the things he spoke of; he so filled it with his own injudicious, partial manner of thrusting a Hottentot or Caffre into every subject of discussion, that she had no chance of feeling anything but distaste. To-day his fervent "God bless you ever, my dear young friend!" sounded to her like a real blessing, and as the train moved off, it was with regret that she saw him turn away. She thought some time of what he had been saying, but after a while Clayfield Lodge and all its inmates were forgotten in anticipations of Burnham.

What two different beings enter a house together when a woman visits the home of him she loves before she is certain that his love for her is as deep! There is the woman who sees that her luggage is come, who enters the room (enchanted ground to her!) with an easy disengaged air of friendliness—who talks to him with the polite indifference of a well-bred lady, who studiously avoids any allusion to feelings, either his or

her own, and there is the woman within, whose heart beats, whose ear listens, whose eye instantaneously notes every variation of voice or look, who feels each hour of the day eventful as it glides on chilling or intensifying her affections; and who talks to him in the depths of her heart with more confidence than she could to any other; these two women now approached Burnham. One cannot but admire the delicate poise of the feminine mind under these circumstances; the balance between full indifference of pride, if no symptom of love is betrayed on the part of the beloved, and the tender devotion to every one of his least wishes if it is; it is something like a miracle, but of daily occurrence.

The carriage sent to meet Constance brought a tiny pencilled note from Miss Hyde, to say that some callers from a distance prevented her from coming, but the footman was quite *au fait* about luggage, and would see to everything.

Burnham was about three miles from Dorking: even on a dim November day, Constance was struck with the prosperous-looking beauty of its environs. After passing through gates at a pretty cottage-lodge, the carriage rolled under a terrace backed by a grove of fine elms: Constance saw that Mr. Hyde and his aunt were walking there some instants before they stopped, and the one raised his hat, and the other waved her handkerchief with kindly energy. She had just been saying, "We must remember, dear Basil, that Constance is very shy; she looks as sensitive as her poor mother, — not like most girls in the present day."

But it was strange how little shy she felt when they had shaken hands at the door; Miss Hyde was so affectionate and pleasant in manner, and Basil looked so noble; he *was* a little stiff in his greetings, till he had

found something to laugh at, and then, animated with the nervous excitement which makes people laugh and talk a good deal, because they hardly know what they feel.

"But you were walking when I came," Constance said, "may I not come out with you again? I should like it if there is time."

"Oh yes, we do not dine till half-past six, but are you not tired? are you sure you would not prefer resting?"

There was no doubt that she much preferred that lingering walk between them, each foot-fall muffled by rust-coloured leaves beneath, when all the distance lay in the dim shade of a November evening, and a soft west wind slowly urged across the sky an unbroken procession of heavy shapeless clouds. Long borders of mignonette edged the terrace walk; and the air was embalmed with its sweetness. Constance could never meet that scent again without a thrill of exquisite remembrance.

Basil had many questions to ask about the Podmores, but finding her firm in her disinclination to ridicule those from whom she had received so much kindness, he said with a tone of mock chagrin, "Well! at least I can show you a better dog than Clayfield Lodge can boast of. Come, aunt, I must introduce Miss Felton to Shag—here Shag! Shag!—I dare say the idle fellow is asleep in the armchair; if you will come in through my den we shall find him."

Basil's sitting room opened upon the terrace; a charming little library it looked; Constance observed at a glance the autumn flowers which were placed in a vase beside the reading desk, and the books which entirely lined the walls of the room; but as the fleecy grey dog by the fire was the object of their visit, he monopolised her admiration.

The style of this house was, in its way, perfect; it had rather small rooms, furnished with as much elegance as can consist with thorough home comfort; there was finish and repose in every part of its domestic arrangements, and as Constance fancied before she had been at Burnham a week, every member of the household looked happy, and just what he or she ought to be—so perfect, so blissful seemed all in Basil's home. She did not know that the lady's maid who borrowed tracts so eagerly from Miss Hyde seldom read them, that a butler had decamped the week before with some family plate, that the smash of a pier glass with the housemaid's broom had so much disturbed the equanimity of her mistress the day before, that Basil, secretly irritated at finding in his constant companion so little strength of mind, had ridden fifteen miles and back merely to recover his spirits and avoid hearing more of the accident. Constance did not guess this, nor any other hidden discomforts: she had not time to find out that it was a real trial to Basil the way in which his aunt was wont to incorporate one of his smallest jokes into every part of her own conversation; particularly if it was one which it had taken her some time to appreciate or understand, for then she dragged it in *ad nauseam;* yet these little things are grating to a fastidious nature, though the very last that can be complained of, because originating in strong affection. Basil on the other hand had no idea of the perplexity and discouragement which his off-hand comments, and ironical forms of speech often occasioned in the mind of his less quick-witted aunt.

In his own home he appeared to far greater advantage than elsewhere, for he could pursue his favourite studies — always calming and wholesome to irritable nerves;

he had besides pensioners and dependants who drew out his kindest feelings; and his behaviour towards his aunt was admirable; he had loved her from boyhood with a deep and grateful affection, and, capricious as he was by temperament, he seldom allowed any change of mood to interfere with the wishes of his aunt, though her happiness was of course affected by every variation of his, for she loved him with an intense admiring fondness; his face was her index of domestic weather, and his opinion, in most cases, final and decisive for her.

He was ironical, — a tone of keen sarcasm was now habitual to him, but it had not been so in former times, for then he was a happier man. Satire is not, as people often say, the effect of pride, nor a proof of self-conceit; like many another satirist he had once revered, and trusted, and hoped much from human beings; he had longed to delight in their excellence, to depend upon their integrity, to honour their magnanimity, but he had been cruelly disappointed; first in other people, and then in himself; and failing to draw from disappointment the sublime lessons it is intended to convey, he became angry with human nature, contemptuous, and often very bitter; and at this time, though pleased and anxious to please, the sarcastic tendency of his thoughts was still frequently apparent.

He had one day been ridiculing an inoffensive neighbour with some severity, and in answer to his aunt's remonstrance said, "What does it matter? Why, if he heard me he would not feel the least hurt, depend upon it, human nature makes up for all deficiencies of intellect by a redundance of self-conceit: some one, I forget who, has told us to

> "take it as a rule,
> No creature smarts so little as a fool.*

* Pope.

I'm sure I have always found it so. You tell me ever and anon to be more lenient to dull people, but have they any mercy towards me? Was this tiresome Mr. Dingleman lenient to me with his very stale Joe Millers? You've no notion," he continued, turning to Constance, "how I suffer from stupid people, I bear it as well as I can, but I feel quite *mangled* by them."

"My dear Basil, you should remember who made both clever and stupid people."

"What that has to do with my feelings, aunt, you know I never *could* see. Suppose I say my nerves are racked by a horrid grinding organ, all out of tune, does it at all apply to the case by way of consolation to tell me that the people who make the dismal noise have no ear? I don't doubt *that*."

"Ah!" said Constance, her voice trembling with eagerness, "as you put it, Mr. Hyde, it does *not* apply; but would it not help you — indeed I think it would — to remember that He who gave you your excellent ear, gave them their dull one? and must we not allow others to enjoy what is to them innocent enjoyment without scorn and impatience — for His sake?"

Basil's tone was altered, and his eye softened when he replied after a moment's pause, "You are quite right," and then to Miss Hyde, "Dear aunt, I beg your pardon for contradicting you; I did not catch your meaning at once, but Miss Felton gives it in admirable paraphrase."

Constance was not perfectly charming, and yet it is true that she perfectly charmed him then. But their little differences of opinion did not always end so happily. They were both talking with Miss Hyde the following evening about a marriage in the neighbourhood which had given some cause for wondering remark,

the bride being lovely and very agreeable, and the bridegroom singularly repulsive.

"But remember," said Constance, "the story of Beauty and the Beast: it is certainly true to nature so far, that the love of a very delightful person transforms a disagreeable man who has always felt himself too displeasing to be loved at all."

"Ah!" Basil answered, "the fancy is pretty enough, but woe betide the woman who trusts to the transforming process when marrying Mr. Beast: he probably remains a beast to the end of the chapter. What made him feel odious, unless he really was so? Bad habits, or, most likely, a harsh unamiable nature; and the effect of these cannot be thrown off like an enchanter's disguise."

"But, indeed, that is not all; people sometimes feel odious because they are slighted, and they are slighted because they have never been understood; — don't laugh, Mr. Hyde, I am not thinking of the vulgar complaint made by *des femmes incomprises*, but of noble and good men: do you remember those lines of Mr. Ruskin's that we found in an Annual at Clayfield Lodge? They express what I mean so beautifully."

"No, I cannot recall them; pray repeat them, if you do."

It cost her an effort, but with a low voice she repeated these lines.

"Nor deem that they whose words are cold.
Whose brows are dark, have hearts of steel;
The couchant strength untraced, untold,
Of thoughts they keep, and throbs they feel,
May need an answering music to unseal;
Who knows what waves may stir the silent sea
Beneath the low appeal
From distant shores of winds unfelt by thee?

What sounds may wake within the winding shell
Responsive to the charm of those that touch it well?"*

"Very beautiful! and almost enough to change my opinion; but really I suspect that the sweetness of that rarely unsealed music is in great measure fancied, because it is hardly won. People make a great deal of an amiable mood which their skill has elicited, and by contrast it seems wonderfully pleasant; yet why is it better than the usual good temper of a genial nature? It appears to me about as inferior as the frost-bitten half-ripe peach that one may have at Michaelmas, when all the summer fruit is gone; one makes a fuss over it as being very nice, but how harsh and sour it is! Trust me, those who like the iron natures you speak of have forgotten what they had in their heart's summer time."

"If they ever had such a time!" said Constance timidly.

Basil started, began to speak, broke off, and muttering, "We can hardly feel alike, for I am nearly forty years old," hastily left the room.

"Poor fellow!" said his aunt, who had been intently occupied with her knitting at the window, "that is rather a sad theme for him: ring the bell, my dear, if you please, it is not yet time to dress, and my old eyes can see to do nothing now."

Constance pondered over this enigma, with painful anxiety. It was clear that he *had* been strongly attached elsewhere; was he still? and to his cousin? Was it possible that all the little symptoms of more than liking, which formed the basis of her present happiness, meant nothing? Could any one seem so much in earnest while merely trifling? Could expressions of deep feeling

* "The Hills of Carrara," Friendship's Offering for 1842.

escape from one who had only a kind interest in her? On the ground of *probability* she could only give a mournful assent to these questions, for nothing seemed then so improbable as that Mr. Hyde should find her worthy of his love; nothing except this, that a noble nature like his should betray and mislead. He who so abhorred falsehood surely could not put on a semblance of feeling? Oh no! she *was* convinced that he loved her a little; and for the rest, heaven would dispose her fate; she had nothing to do but wait, and love on, and keep hope within bounds.

So she reasoned with herself during a week of such sunny days as November sometimes brings to soothe the fear of winter. So pleasantly did the Hydes manage to link her in among their daily concerns, that she began to feel one of their home circle, though a guest, and she experienced a singular kind of exultation in finding that she had now become one of the initiated in Burnham ways: the little jokes passing between Basil and his aunt, she now for the most part understood; she knew the origin of their playful names for different children in the village, and could appreciate their allusions to old sources of diversion; — and this ability, slight as it may seem, gave her a most agreeable sensation of being "one of them."

CHAP. XVI.

"Être avec les gens qu'on aime, cela suffit: rêver, leur parler, ne leur parler point, penser à eux, penser à des choses plus indifférentes, mais auprès d'eux, tout est égal."—LA BRUYÈRE.

EVERYONE knows how completely unconscious we may all be of what is agitating the heart of a companion; in general we perceive nothing of the feelings of our neighbour which our minds are not prepared to expect: on the other hand such feelings as are not likely to be expected are seldom suffered to transpire; however much they may occupy the heart, nature draws a veil over them, and guards them thus from any interference from without.

Alone, imagination may fill our world with the varying tints of individual sentiment, but in the presence of any one else we suffer reason to resume her control, and we speak, and act, and in great measure *think* according to her dictates: the romance of life lies deep below the surface, and rarely disturbs its upper current; and people love, and are loved, raise bright hopes and disappoint, and change their own and other's fate so quietly, that no one finds out what has been going on. It was thus with Miss Hyde; not having the least suspicion that her nephew could fall in love with Constance, thinking her entirely out of the question considering his antecedents, she never even observed what a less vigilant companion—a less kind friend might have ascertained.

It was often remarked among her acquaintance that Miss Hyde said she was very desirous that her dear Basil should marry, but that somehow or other, whenever it began to seem likely that, he would form an engagement, she prevented it. Perhaps those who made the remark knew too little of their private history to form a just opinion of her motives.

There was joy on the faces of both one morning when Constance entered the breakfast-room.

"Elinor will be here to-morrow," said Miss Hyde; "I am so eager for you to see her: relations are not fair judges, but I shall be disappointed if you do not find her fascinating."

"She must be very pretty if the miniature you have showed me is a good likeness."

"Oh," said Basil, "no artist ever did her justice; it is not her face only that one feels so bewitching, it is her whole nature, as soon I hope you will know."

Constance felt wordless while breakfast went on, and conversation recurred again and again to Miss Lee's welcome letter; she heard them talk eagerly about the trains, and time for going to meet her, without much heeding what was said until her attention was arrested by Basil's saying,

"My uncle is wonderfully confiding to trust her out of his sight so soon after her illness."

"Oh," replied his aunt, "Elinor is quite a spoiled child; she can do whatever she likes—with one exception of course."

"Yes, but you know that like many another spoiled child, she has quite as much anxiety in trying to keep her father in good humour, as he has in preventing any rough breath of fate from touching her; their good offices are reciprocal as far as that goes; and I was

afraid she would have had to smoothe him down many weeks before he could forgive us for taking her where she caught cold. Do you have much of this sort of work with Mr. Felton?" he added, turning to Constance.

"No indeed, he seldom seems ruffled enough to want smoothing down." Her voice did not invite him to prolong conversation, and he was taking up the newspaper, when Miss Hyde began again, "Oh, my dear Basil, pray leave the paper alone, if you once begin reading, I shall be unable to get a word out of you, and I want to know who you wish me to ask to meet Elinor."

"The fewer the better."

"Well, but we must not be selfish; and you know we waited to ask those new people till she came."

"What, the Carterets? Oh! not them, aunt; let them wait; they are so noisy, and Elinor is easily stunned."

"The Miss Dunns are quiet enough, I am sure; shall I ask them to dine here on Tuesday with Captain Ellis and his brother?"

"Spare us the Miss Dunns, dear aunt, they always affect me disagreeably, looking like so many round, sweet things, all of one shape and colour; how insipid they must feel, poor girls! A sharp stroke of affliction might be welcome as giving them a sense of individuality.—Pray don't go Miss Felton; I beg your pardon for all this domestic talk, but you know you are behind scenes with us. Ah! do sit down, for if you go my aunt will begin scolding me."

Constance gladly stayed, and took her work basket to the window.

"Don't believe Basil's nonsense, my dear; he is *very* provoking, but I have been used to him now too many years to be angry. If I may not have the Carterets or

the Dunns, you really must submit to Mr. and Mrs. Deane —such good, worthy people, and young Mr. Holding, you do not object to him?"

"Don't press me about that: he is as ignorant of his social latitude and longitude as any schoolboy; he really can hardly sit down in a chair without such exuberance of motion that one fears he will never compose himself;—quite a gentleman at heart no doubt, but on the surface a most apprehensive bore."

"And Sir Henry Lowe?"

"Oh yes, if we must have one, let us knock them all off together; but, Miss Felton, take care how you go near that man, he is loaded with dangerous shot;—primed with his own pamphlets on political economy; and quite unsparing in his fire if once his trigger is touched."

"I wish there were more pleasant people in the world!" Constance ejaculated with a naïveté that made them both laugh.

"But I thought," said Basil, "that you professed rather a liking for stupid people, and they are generally to be had."

"I dislike them exceedingly, if they are ill-bred too; perhaps because they make me feel so rude and stupid myself, that at last I get quite sulky."

"Well, I have certainly observed,—pardon my boldness in saying so,—that your supplies of courtesy do not always hold out quite so long as the visits of our heavy neighbours at Minster. You begin very well, and are cordial for half an hour; but if after that time you see no signs of their moving, a perceptible chill stiffens your manners."

"Very wrong, if it is so," sighed Constance; "but *you* cannot imagine how difficult conversation is to keep up in *very* quiet circles. I am so used, for instance, to

having really *nothing* that I can talk to people about with interest, that if, by any chance, there is plenty to talk of, I find myself enlarging absurdly on each branch of the subject."

"My dear, you always talk very pleasantly to my thinking," said Miss Hyde, stroking her soft hair kindly, as she stood beside her.

"And supposing," said Basil, "that you were *more* unequal in conversational powers than you are, it would be far pleasanter than having people speak in an even, made-up way, without a spark of originality. I'll tell you what I compare such people to,—very neat handwriting between two lines, the one the line of duty, the other of conventional propriety; now, in my case, I do not seem to want the upper line, a free scrawl, on the only line *I* think necessary for my guidance, is the sort of character that best expresses my nature: not one of the Podmores ever made a single flourish that overpassed their propriety line (except Hester, when she said she *really* liked sitting by young Head at a dinner-party); but as for you, Miss Felton—"

Constance blushed and said, "Do *I* then?"

"To be sure, your enthusiasm takes your fine upstrokes beyond it, many a time; but never too far."

"We must really take ourselves away from your idle company, dear Basil; do you see how late it is? You will drive us out this afternoon, will you not?"

"With pleasure. Miss Felton wishes to see the old chestnuts again, and Deep Dene she never seems tired of."

Those pleasant chattings which stirred so many thoughts in her mind; those delightful drives, when she could sit and think about Basil with little or no interruption from his occasionally turning round to point

out something noticeable, or his aunt now and then making a goodnatured remark, to show that her dozing did not make her insensible to the presence of a guest (for the old lady always nodded a little in the carriage), —those happy evenings together round the wide hearth, must now be totally altered; the presence of a fourth, and that fourth Elinor Lee, would make all different, — perhaps even Basil himself.

CHAP. XVII.

"Ne she was derke ne broune, but bright
And clere as is the mone light,
Again whom all the sterris semen
But small candelis as we demen.
Her fleshe was tendre as dewe of floure,
Her chere was simple as birde in boure."—CHAUCER.

"Loue is a careful thing (God wot), and passing full of drede."
Author uncertain.

MISS HYDE would have been fond of Elinor under any circumstances; but as an heiress, perfectly elegant in appearance, and always acting with graceful self-possession, she doted on her: if she had been poor, she must have loved her tenderly; coming to her house with such an extremely refined maid, and all appliances to match, she seemed to her a non-pareil.

Half an hour before she arrived, Constance had asked, with even more diffidence than her words expressed, if Miss Hyde really liked her to stay during Miss Lee's short visit; she feared she should be altogether *de trop;* and warm assurances that they particularly wished her to meet Elinor, scarcely removed the impression.

Her pulse beat hurriedly as she heard a soft voice and low laugh mingling with Basil's and his aunt's, in the hall; she wished she was able to get out of the room before the door opened; she felt miserably shy. But Elinor Lee came in, and with gentle cordiality, said that she was so glad to meet Miss Felton; she had

heard so much about her; and then, passing on to the nearest window, asked if she had noticed a very fine range of Alp-like clouds? "We have been watching them some time from the carriage, and I think you can see them well from here."

Her kindness and tact saved Constance from the series of politely ignorant questions so often addressed to a stranger on first meeting; she did not begin with "Have you been here many days?" or "Were you ever at Burnham before?" but spoke at once of interests common to them both.

She *was* lovely; she at least was not "the dwarf of presage." * All that the Hydes had said of her failed to describe the sweetness and serenity of her manner. Her face was beautiful, both in feature and expression, and a touch of sadness gave it the pathetic interest which mournfulness in plainer features can seldom awaken.

Taller and slighter in figure than Constance, and some years older, too, there was a curious tint of likeness between them,—something in the set of the eyes, or shape of the forehead, that when one of them was present would have recalled the other to mind; such resemblances *are* possible, even when there is positive ugliness in one face, and decided beauty in another; but in this case there was that degree of similarity which the humble little *miosotis* † of spring bears to the forget-me-not of summer, with its full soft eye, and smoother, freer growth.

Constance was eminently wanting in that peculiar grace which Goethe defines as "eine zur Anmuth gemilderte Anmassung" (an arrogance softened to a

* A. Tennyson's "Princess."

† Commonly, but incorrectly, called the Blue Mouse Ear.

grace). If she had not been so deficient in this, she would have been probably more beloved, as well as more admired (for since we are by *all* considerations bound to pay due respect to every one, it is pleasanter to have this quietly claimed by another, than exacted by conscience from an unwilling mind); with great natural dignity in some respects, in movement she had none; and she was never more conscious of it than now; it made her stumble in passing hastily from one end of the room to the other, while Elinor was softly treading along with gentle stateliness; she felt that Basil must be making involuntary comparisons, and as soon as it was possible to do so without rudeness, she retired to her own room.

Until that hour she had been unusually free from anxiety about her personal appearance. At Burnham externals were seldom talked about, and neither Miss Hyde nor her nephew ever seemed to think much of dress; an elderly lady's quiet dressing, however rich it might be, made no unfavourable contrast to the economical neatness of her own toilette; but she fancied already that Miss Lee had been surprised by it, and after musing painfully for a few minutes, she began to prepare for dinner with a more elaborate dressing than she was used to even in Basil's home.

Poor girl! there was no one present to smile at her indecision about which dress, what bow, what mittens she should wear, whether her best brooch, or only what she called her "Sunday locket."

When Constance went from home, she had the distinctive peculiarity of a poor visitor, in bringing a large collection of dresses that would *almost* do, and not one quite suitable for every common occasion, as if it were possible by an accumulation of half-shabby things to make a *tout ensemble* of personal propriety, when the

very reverse is effected; but now they all appeared shabby to her, and every little ornament that she tried *chétif;* the bows looked flat and tired, and the clasps of her trumpery bracelets caught in her dress, and then hung and clung in any wrong way they could. Even the manufactures of men follow the rule of man's nature; they favour the prosperous, and deny their aid to those who are poor and therefore want it most.

It is an amusing proof of our aptness for "imaginations as one would,"* the way we commonly speak about dress; "*only* about a dress,"—"such a trifle as dress," and the like, as if it was a trifle; though almost every woman in civilised countries feels and knows that it gives her a kind of second personality, either better or worse than her own as the case may be.

It is thought *right* to speak as if dress was an insignificant adjunct; and therefore on this point neither feeling nor observation of fact are often allowed to find voice; but not all the good and wise theories in the world could have made Constance insensible to dress that evening: and when she reached the drawing-room, her sensations and her looks would have been an eloquent commentary upon the saying of Madame de Stäel's that "La grâce, ce charme suprême de la beauté, ne se dévéloppe que dans le repos du naturel et de la confiance; les inquiétudes et la contrainte ôtent les avantages même qu'on possède; le visage s'altère par la contraction de l'amour propre; on ne tarde pas à s'en apercevoir, et le chagrin que cause une telle découverte augmente encore le mal qu'on voudrait réparer."†

* Bacon's Essay on Truth.

† Sur Les Passions.

CHAP. XVIII.

"Non è d' invidia affetto,
Ch 'a sospirar mi mena;
Ma sol d' una pietà ch 'ò di me stesso."—ARIOSTO.

"So much woodwork remains identical; so much else is not identical!"—T. CARLYLE.

IF Constance had dreaded seeing how much happier Basil would be with his cousin, she found the expectation a mistake. Miss Hyde was the only one of the party who showed any gaiety of spirits during the evening. Elinor was tired with her journey; Basil unusually silent; Constance shy, and vexed with herself for feeling so ill at ease. She glanced anxiously from one to the other when Miss Hyde went to the tea-table, and vainly tried to guess their mood; what *was* making Mr. Hyde look so pensive, unless the disappointment of hearing at dinner that General Lee could not spare his daughter for more than five days?

He now sat silently near her with his eyes fixed on the sparkles of the wood fire opposite; and his reverie was so profound that Elinor had time to rise from the sofa, and lay her white hand upon his shoulder unobserved, till she said,

"Are you well, dear Basil? Do you know that aunt is giving Miss Felton her tea, and that I have actually been obliged to rouse myself to tell you how lazy you are?"

"Hard at work within, Elinor," he replied without

smiling, "there are a good many rebels to be subdued there still, and they always begin to stir when I see you!"

He was answered by a look of the tenderest pity and affection; *that* Constance saw, and did not raise her eyes again till they were all talking together at tea. "Happy cousin!" she thought, "*how* happy to enjoy his confidence!" What more she had, or possibly *had* had, remained to her a problem. She felt more and more convinced that the cousins were no longer lovers in the usual sense of the word; but the conviction that one who had such an exquisite creature as Elinor to love, could never feel much for a shrinking, awkward being like herself, strengthened also. She saw her transporting visions fade away; even in the depths of her heart they began to look utterly unreal; but the gentleness and meekness of her nature saved her from the anguish of mortified pride; she had misconstrued the kindness of a person much older, much more clever and distinguished than herself;—she had believed he could love her, because she knew she *could* please him,—but that must have been all, and now she would be wiser, and expect nothing beyond kindness. *Not* to admire him, not to pity his secret grief, whatever that was, not to love his generosity and frankness, these were tasks which at present she could not undertake.

So she thought while listening to the duets they sang together, with a dreamy kind of feeling that their well-harmonised voices came from a beautiful region quite unattainable to her; and when afterwards Basil sat down by her, and drew her into interesting conversation for the remainder of the evening, she took her part in it with a simple, childlike wish to please him and his cousin in any way she could, and almost forgot her

previous anxieties about her appearance beside Miss Lee, feeling that of course she looked what she was, an inferior being; but from the moment this was firmly acknowledged to herself, she enjoyed comparative peace.

Hers was a submissive nature; so it ever had been, and so it would be as long as she moved on this earth; subject to shame, to fear of giving pain, to causing offence — and liable to frequent dejection, and even prostration of spirits among her fellow creatures: no degree of honour, no amount of praise from them could raise her to such buoyancy and glee as she felt when alone with flowers, and birds, and animals.

She resolved the next day to keep as much out of the way of others as she could; but this by no means suited Basil, who seemed particularly desirous to prevent her feeling left out in any little scheme for the day's amusement; partly guessing what she felt, he contrived by many indescribable little arts to make her unconscious of eclipse; she was touched with his kindness, but her diffidence gave it a painful interpretation. "If he did not think me a wretched failure beside her, would he ever take such pains to spare my self-love?"

He succeeded, however, in giving her one lively pleasure that day,—he asked her to sew a button on his glove, seeking her out in the drawing-room, where she sat alone, and saying that his aunt was busy, and Elinor writing letters, and so he came to her;—he would wait for the glove—was not there another little hole? Oh! never mind getting silk of that particular colour—any she had would do; and while she worked, he got her to praise Elinor to his heart's content, and told her several pleasant little anecdotes of their early days, "When," he said, "neither she nor I were quite

such lonely people as we have been since. What book have you now in hand? Tieck? Ah! you must enjoy him; his Phantasie, is it not lovely? But did you ever read anything of Ernst Schultze's?"

Constance did not even know the name.

"You should read his 'Poetisches Tagebuch." He is the Petrarch of German literature as far as tenderness, grace, and many-toned repetitions of one grief can make a German writer. His poetry is not, perhaps, first-rate, but it is seldom cold. You could lend Miss Felton Schultze's 'Tagebuch,' Elinor," he said, taking up his gloves, and turning towards Miss Lee, who just then came in.

"*Yours*, dear Basil," she replied, her eyes a little expanded with the surprise she evidently meant to betray.

"Ay, if you do not object, you can send it by railway when you get home, if you will be so good."

Elinor went to the window, and asked if he was inclined for a ride after luncheon; "But I do not know," she said, "whether you ride, Miss Felton; I should have found that out first before I claimed Basil's horse and company."

"Oh, no! I cannot ride well, and hardly ever do; if I may drive or walk with Miss Hyde I should like that best."

And after a little consultation the walk was agreed upon; Miss Hyde wished to go and see her infant school, and would like Constance to go with her.

It was long before Constance could learn to think of the cottages, the narrow lanes, and little gardens of this village as having anything in common with other villages; passing through it almost every day with Basil and his aunt, she could not look at the public house, the

grocer's shop, and the tiny post office as common institutions; all had for her an especial and magical charm. Basil had spoken of each in one way or another, and association had invested the most vulgar facts with interest; he had once patted the curly head of a little girl who lived at the butcher's shop, and from that day the very butcher boy had his own halo of romance.

Very gradually did this sentimental impression yield to common sense. As she walked slowly to the school with Miss Hyde, she noticed, for the first time, a dusty back lane, where two lean dogs were yelping at the scuffle of several angry boys; that broke the spell a little; she felt that the inevitable burden of humanity was borne there also, and noticed ugly nettles thronging one side of the Burnham Road.

Miss Hyde was very good, very kind, and fond of Constance, but she was not gifted with penetration, and being possessed with thoughts of Elinor, talked of little else till they got home again.

The cousins returned in high spirits; a beautiful afternoon and a long ride had restored to both their vivacity. Constance was fanciful, and she fancied there was more distance and caution in Basil's manner towards herself,—had Elinor said anything to him about her? Yes; just that sort of saying by which only a woman can consciously or unconsciously rob another of her *prestige*. Basil was vain, and Elinor's influence with him unbounded; he was now so much attached to Constance that he did not like to canvass her merits with one who could speak of her with indifference or disparagement, but he was at the same time too uncertain of his intentions to care to confess a preference, he therefore sheltered himself from his cousin's observation by hearing her remarks with seeming nonchalance, and

by a slight chill in his manner towards his young guest. If she or Elinor had had a deeper knowledge of human nature this would not have deceived them; for often what looks like the withdrawal of warmer feeling is in fact its surest proof; the heart feels in danger and doubles its restraints.

Constance patiently accepted a very different meaning. She resigned herself now to being a mere spectator of the happiness she could not share; she felt at times the sort of shock at her own presence that one can imagine feeling if able to place oneself on the foreground of a very beautiful picture; so pure and bright seemed the domestic sunshine in which her drooping figure stood, paralysed by the slow pains of mortification, and often while listening in silence to the animated conversation going on around her, full of incident and widely various in allusion, but more witty and more expressive than any to which she was used, tears of dejection stole out, and she had a writhing sense of her entire unfitness for companionship either with Basil or his beautiful cousin.

With people so "subtle-thoughted, myriad-minded," she felt herself unable to keep pace; she forgot the peculiar wealth of thought in her own mind, and only remembered its want of vivid experience. She saw what she had deemed an ideal combination of blessings securely enjoyed; pure and lofty aspirations; highly cultivated powers; beauty of form and affluence of means, for all that intellect or affection could desire; and those who possessed them innocently rejoicing in their fulness; and beside them, she felt herself so poor and monotonous, such an alien in their finer atmosphere, that her every tone and gesture was meant to express, "Have patience with me, I am not and cannot be as you are!"

But her meaning was not conveyed to any mind about her, because it did not correspond with the thoughts and feelings of her companions. Basil perceived that she was out of spirits, but when he tried to amuse her she was now more than ever reserved; and she, while endeavouring to repel in her own mind the least remaining notion of his love by her manner, effectually repelled him. He was under the mistaken belief that Miss Hyde must have told her that Elinor was engaged, and could not guess why her tone with him was altered. The other two were simply preoccupied, perfectly kind in word and deed to Constance, and never dreaming that anything they did or said could make her suffer. Neither of them had ever been in her circumstances, and few people are diviners.

Once, when she was out of the room, Elinor broke off in an amusing story about a Quaker's wedding to say: "How very silent your dear little Constance is, aunt! Is she never more lively than she has been these two days?"

"She is always gentle in manner; I have not noticed that she was silent, but she can be very merry and very amusing sometimes."

"Living quite out of the world, I should think, is she not?"

"Oh! completely, my dear, quite buried in an old rambling house in ——shire; her father is rather eccentric, and has no society hardly."

"Did it ever occur to you, dear aunt, that Basil might take it into his kind head to be in love with her?"

"*Basil!*" said Miss Hyde, with an emphasis of surprise that testified to the novelty of the idea; "impossible! what *could* make you imagine such an out-of-

the-way notion? Oh! no, my love, it's *impossible*;—she's quite a child compared to Basil, and besides —— pray do not suggest such a possibility to him, or he will never like me to have her here again."

Elinor had been smiling at the warmth of her aunt's disclaimer, but she answered sadly, "No, indeed, I never have the heart to speak to him about any future prospects, it always renews his sorrow; but I wish he could find a nice wife, poor fellow; I am sure dear Cecilia would have wished it."

The discussion so interesting to them both was cut short by the return of Constance; she stooped to pick up the ball of lambswool that had rolled from Miss Hyde's hands in the impetuosity of her gestures when saying "Impossible!" five minutes before.

Constance had just said the same to herself upstairs; but there is sometimes a lingering credulity in the use of that word. Miss Hyde looked at her rather keenly once or twice after this, but the quiet, sensible face allayed the least suspicion of such presumption as attempting to win Basil's heart, and *her* "impossible!" was fully believed; nevertheless, when Constance spoke to her, in the course of the afternoon, about her father's wish that she should return home at the end of the week, Miss Hyde expressed her regret that the time was so near (for it was Tuesday), without asking whether Mr. Felice would object to any longer delay.

CHAP. XIX.

"Dann zürn' ich mir für jeden Blick,
Der heimlich nach Dir fliehet,
Und für die Schwäche, die zurück
In Deinen Bann mich ziehet."

FRANZ DINGELSTEDT.

ALL through that unhappy day a keen and fidgety east wind ruffled the yellow leaves, withering as the thoughts which made poor Constance withdraw from conversation as much as she could.

There was no going out. Elinor was amusing herself with drawing; Basil watched her skilful pencil with delight, fond of her fanciful style, but still fonder of showing her how much she might improve herself in it if she chose; Miss Hyde sat opposite, knitting and gazing at them alternately, her thoughts going back many years as she traced likenesses to those whom she could look upon no more, and occasionally caught the familiar accents of voices that had long been silenced by death.

Behind her, in the deep embrasure of a western window sat Constance; she had taken her book there, as if for better light, but her eye sought for liberty in the wild autumnal sky. The wind had risen as the day declined, and now all the trees seemed frenzied with its incessant raging cry; as their bare arms shuddered violently against the cold, bright sky, Constance felt more inclined to go out and seek the dumb sympathy of

Nature, than to remain in sight of such unapproachable human bliss. It was only unapproachable, and only bliss in her morbid imagination. Basil had twice appealed to her on some question of perspective, and twice she had answered with such a shy, uncommunicative air, that he concluded her book was more interesting than his remarks, and did not speak to her again.

Dressing-time came, and besides dressing, she had to prepare herself for being pleasant to the guests who were that day asked to dinner.

Were all the pins that came up crooked, and the hooks that would not hook, and the clothes that came on with that thwarting drag back, peculiar to the ill-fitting raiment of nervous people — were they *all* in conspiracy with fate? And then when she went down, what ill luck led her to try and get into conversation with the brother of Captain Ellis, who was standing silent near her?

Not knowing who she was, and being desirous of nearer access to Elinor, he replied with scanty civility, and then passed by with the silent, scornful indifference felt by handsome, fashionable young men, for a very plainly dressed, and unattractive young woman.

Constance read his thoughts with regard to herself so clearly, — he was so evidently occupied with his own good looks and social talents, that she felt more amused than piqued by his manner; but it gave one more touch of depression: "so," she said to herself, "would Mr. Hyde feel and act towards me, if he was not so essentially generous and kind."

After dinner she found herself committed to sitting beside Mrs. Deane for the rest of the evening; a good and amiable woman, but one so possessed with national school interests, and what her late rector had done in

their parish, that to every one who accosted her, she soon gave a share of the treasure of her heart, — to Constance a large portion, because she looked so fixedly patient; and yet when Mrs. Deane asked, after a complete recapitulation of the lamented rector's parochial charity, "Now, my dear Miss Felton, was not that more than *most* people would have done with the soup?" she hastily replied, "Kindly thought of, indeed!" and had to be brought back from a dreary review of that day's sorrow, by Mrs. Deane's saying, in rather a touchy voice,

"*Thinking* was not all, you see, it was *securing* that each person should have a good piece of meat in the soup, which was such a striking proof of his solicitude — so peculiarly characteristic of dear Mr. Simmons."

Though she had been put in a position to recognise *all* his characteristics by the end of the evening, Constance did not feel much encouraged by his example; indeed, if Mrs. Deane had been admitted to one of the charitable institutions, organised by her late rector, before she accepted Miss Hyde's invitation to dinner, it would have benefited Constance more than all his other good deeds put together, for she was longing to be able to attend to what was going on at the other side of the room. Elinor was of course the centre of the group, and Basil not far from her; she never talked, or sung, or looked so well, as she did under the brightening influence of his appreciation; and this she seemed to claim,—in her own graceful fashion, as her unalienable right; and as his manner towards her in general society had the frank, protective tenderness of an elder brother, neither of them afforded food for gossip to any rumour-raiser, who cared at all for *vraisemblance.*

As often as her eye could escape from Mrs. Deane's,

Constance glanced towards them. She noticed the eager assiduity of several gentlemen who were asking Elinor to sing; she caught half-sentences of implied compliment, which only her exceeding beauty could clear from the charge of absurdity and extravagance. But, as Constance easily saw, Elinor was indifferent to all these flattering attentions; she received them with a gentle smile and every polite mark of pleasure, but they were as little to her as the bunch of wild flowers which children will bring to an older friend out of doors, where fresh and bright ones grow in profusion, and which is soon laid down and forgotten.

It was with an indefinable mixture of admiration and awe and envy that Constance watched her now. Such placid completeness was wonderful to her — wonderful the imperturbable serenity of her movements, and the quiet emphasis which she gave, in perfect good taste, to all her little fancies and notions. Surely only Basil could venture to find any fault with such perfection! She pitied him, for he was to lose his cousin to-morrow. General Lee insisted on her return with the unbending will which, in a few cases, even his daughter found herself powerless to withstand.

"I shall hear from you, Ellie, as soon as the Indian mail is in?" said Basil on the following morning, just before she left.

"Oh, yes! and before then; that seems *so* long off. I count the days like a schoolboy waiting for his holidays."

"Well, do pray go on with your drawing; see how that will help to pass time. You want practice, and, *I* think, a few more lessons from a first-rate master. Shall I ask Walter Erskine to look out for one for you? He knows all about artists, and is just in the way of that sort of thing."

"Thank you; but he might then be rather in my way too."

"Ah! but you might give the poor fellow such a little pleasure as that. Did you mean to leave this pretty view of the house for me?"

"No," said Elinor, turning to Constance, who was in the conservatory, holding a bunch of flowers for Miss Hyde to tie. "I thought you might perhaps like to have this poor sketch, Miss Felton, in default of better: you seemed to wish for one when we looked over my portfolio. It is not worth your thanks, indeed, but you see it was taken from your favourite seat on the terrace."

Elinor knew by instinct what a treasured possession this would be, and observed that Basil appeared not to know, for he muttered carelessly—

"A pity you have not any sketch of Deep-Dene for Miss Felton, she would much prefer that;" and either Constance did not hear, or she did not choose to answer.

Having thanked Miss Lee for so kindly remembering her wish, she stooped down to pat Shag and soothe him with her caresses.

The dog disliked signs of a departure, and seemed half afraid that his master was going too. Shag quite appreciated Basil's genial nature — his humour and inexhaustible *verve*. They loved each other truly, if not equally, and Basil certainly contrived to amuse his four-footed friend as deliciously as he could divert humans. Constance watched the dog's face that morning, intently waiting for a kind word from his master, with a feeling of envy: *he*, poor beast, could be with him in joy or sorrow always.

After Elinor was gone, Constance saw nothing of Mr. Hyde until an hour before dinner, when they sat together in the dusk. One of the windows had been

left with shutters unclosed and open curtain to let in a flood of moonlight, and candles were voted a disturbance. Miss Hyde mused by the fire, and after awhile Basil tried to fill up the blank in their little party by talking of her they so much missed. Constance spoke of her with warm admiration.

"Was her mother a very beautiful woman?" she asked.

"Nothing remarkable; but my mother *was* beautiful, and Elinor is more like her than my aunt—her mother, you know. My other cousin — my poor Cecilia — was still more so."

"Has she been dead many years?" said Constance, lowering her voice, for Basil's had sunk almost to a whisper.

"Heaven has had her twelve years; and though when we lost her I was but a young man, Miss Felton, it almost killed me."

They said no more, for he got up and went to the window, and stood there long, looking out upon the motionless brightness beyond. Constance also was absorbed in thought. Now she knew the cause of his fitful melancholy and of his brother-like love for the cousin who survived; but she felt a restless desire to know more, and when she was alone with Miss Hyde after dinner — sitting on a low stool at her feet, and stroking her thin hand — the dim firelight gave her courage to say —

"Do you mind telling me whether Mr. Hyde was going to marry the cousin he lost? I thought he almost said as much before dinner, or I should not have asked such a question."

"Yes, dear, they had been engaged many years before she died — in heart at least; but her father would not hear of it. It's a sad story to go over;

poor Cecilia bore all opposition so meekly! Yet it told upon her at last, and when the doctors begun to speak of consumptive symptoms, the general was frightened, and gave in, and they were allowed to meet again; and, *though* first cousins, he recognised their engagement. That time—those few happy months — I shall never forget; both of them were so perfectly happy, unless, as I thought afterwards, she suspected what was coming."

There was a pause, and when Constance asked, "Did she die *soon* after then?" Miss Hyde answered, "Yes, it was rapid decline; you know happiness may come too late."

Evidently the old lady was occupied with sad thoughts that made her scarcely conscious of the curiosity of her young friend; for, after keeping silence some minutes, she said, "What we fear now is that the same thing should come over again with dear Elinor; her father puts every difficulty in the way of her marriage, though I believe he does not entirely *forbid* the engagement."

She spoke slowly, and Constance remained in suspense for a few moments longer before she went on to say, "Major Haworth is now in India with his regiment, and it is a long time before he can return; but if she was certain of her father's consent *then*, I think she could stand the trial, for she has more strength than her sister ever had, and her patience is quite angelic."

"I should never have guessed that she knew much of sorrow, by her manner."

"No, because she has so thoroughly subdued herself to perfect resignation. Elinor does not talk much about her religion, but it is often her *only* consolation." Basil joined them now, and tea soon followed: it was a silent evening with all three.

CHAP. XX.

"For love, all love of other sights controules,
And makes one little room an everywhere."—DONNE.

Two days later Constance was on her way home. She had parted with the Hydes at the nearest railway-station, hurriedly, the ruthless shrieking of the engine cutting short Miss Hyde's affectionate last words, and depriving her of anything but a short good-bye and grasp of the hand from Basil; who, when he had got her ticket, was hunting about in the cloak-room for a little packet from Elinor, containing a book he had asked her to lend Constance. It was found, and got out just in time,— given her through the window, with one more pleasant smile,— and then they were seen a moment on the platform,—and then she was quickly far away.

Nothing had "passed between them," as people say. Nothing decisive had been said; and in her fear lest a full heart should betray herself at the crisis of a parting, Constance had been even more than usually self-contained.

"Come with me to look for Schultze, won't you?" Basil had said when he brought the ticket; "ladies' eyes are much sharper than ours." But no; an ill-fated instinct of shyness held her back from that to which feeling impelled her, and she said, "Oh, no! thank you, I must not leave your aunt among all these

people, and I am sure it will not do for her to hurry about with us."

The *no* was as much as Basil heeded in her answer, to him a disappointing no.

It was a bright, still December morning; the air was soft, and all the dew a glitter, without frost. This sort of day has a singular effect sometimes; it seems, till noon is past, like a prolonged early morning, with its low sun, and quiet freshness of atmosphere.

Constance felt its calm, for in her heart was a deeper peace — the peace which love attains, when prayer has been fervent, and faith is unconsciously supported by a secret earthly hope; but her lip trembled as she looked at the flowers in her hand, and the book on her lap. A comfortable burst of tears was impossible, for the carriage was full, and many eyes at leisure: immediately opposite her sat a young school-girl, with a stolid, puppy-dog sort of face, killing time with gingerbread and blank stares. So Schultze was a defence, and the title-page bore an inscription which, to the mind of Constance, was occupation enough. It was but a line. *Cecilia Lee, from Basil Hyde, in remembrance of May* 12*th*, 18—.

How many years back! she herself was then only a child, and he probably thought of her as a child still: — and she *might* have been with him those last five minutes without any indiscretion, if she had not been so foolishly timid! He might have said something that would have been sweeter to recall now, than the mere good-bye of common friendliness. The remembrance of this mistake, brought many others to mind; it really seemed, in looking back, that she had contrived to say and do everything that could persuade him of her indifference.

There are many kinds of vultures that feed on the human heart; a small one was now beginning to prey upon hers — the merciless vulture of regret: striving to escape from its anguish, she once more repeated to herself her undoubting creed in the special providence that *must* direct and overrule *every* human interest; "for," as she thought, "if the Almighty works at all by human agency, His will must be brought out in everything that affects us — even in our own blunders, and the consequent mistakes of other people. I have submitted my cause to him who governs *all* things, who can turn the king's heart, as Solomon says, whichever way He will. Why should I worry my heart about these mistakes? If it is to be, no mistakes will be allowed to hinder it."

Alas! poor girl! your pious logic is irrefragable, and for the present you reap all the blessings of faith; but is there no guardian angel to remind you that you are casting anchor in waters none can fathom? Have you no suspicion that when we bring into connection the will of God in *permitting* and the will of man in *causing* evil or sorrow, we touch upon a mystery so profound, that reason must pass it by, and faith veil our eyes, lest looking into that abyss we should be confounded and reel with perplexity and terror, not yet seeing there Him who "hideth himself in thick darkness." Does no misgiving steal in that while trusting to Heaven to bring about that which your own actions are seemingly bent to frustrate, you look for miracles, and unconsciously abuse the gift of a reasonable judgment?

Not yet. At present she only feels the omnipotence of God: it is not till a later period that the reflective mind is aghast at the evidence of *human* power for

working human woe, and perplexed in trying to harmonise the decrees of the Supreme Will, with the permitted errors of that finite will which is free alike to err in judgment and to sin.

Constance had a long journey that day, and before she reached Ashenholt, the sun had set, and she could watch the grey fleece of steam clouds unwinding in softest folds, and pressed downwards by the frosty evening air, rolling to the ground where it was flat, quickly climbing up the banks of the cuttings, and floating away through the bare hedges, which hid the levels beyond: they looked like living creatures, for now she was without companions, and imagination seized upon everything which it could endow with temporary life; they looked full of motion and eager pursuit, and yet how soon had each wreathing curl of vapour melted away to nothing! Why did she not compare their vain show with the futile activity of hope!

But now she was close to home, and the happiness of being again with her father and mother and little sister almost overpowered every other feeling. There is an ecstacy of joy in returning to a quiet home which only sensitive natures can appreciate: the escape of a bird from its temporary cage to its own woodland haunts gives some idea of what such shrinking creatures feel.

"Now you must surely admire Constance Felton, dear Basil?" said his aunt that same evening, as they sat at dessert.

"She is a very interesting girl."

"That will not do for me; you call every one who falls short of hideousness interesting when you wish to praise them, and dear Constance deserves something more distinguishing."

"She is not like other women, aunt, and I have not

yet found out the right way of complimenting her," replied Basil, who extremely disliked having his feelings probed.

"My dear, I think compliments would be quite thrown away upon her; she is much too sensible to enjoy them."

"No doubt."

"Do you not think her particularly lady-like and pleasing?"

He answered with a short and unmodulated monosyllable; a sound not unlike that of a piano note, when its wire is rusted or loose. His whole being was out of tune, and the cord on which she harped, jarred painfully, for his feelings and his judgment were at variance with what he believed to be prudence.

His aunt was determined notwithstanding to find out what he really thought of Constance, and went on,

"It is not that she is pretty—not at all, I should say; but there is something *so* winning in the expression of her face."

Basil was aware, though not lifting his eyes from Shag, whose ears he was gently pulling, that Miss Hyde had fastened a searching glance upon his countenance, and he answered, "Indeed! I should hardly fancy her face winning to *most* people; there is so much self-control in every line of it, that even her smile seemed to have as certain a destination as a posted letter:—but what a long time we are over these chestnuts! I am sure you must want a little nap before tea." And with this hint he cut short the conversation. It was irksome to him, as he had, without any questioning, satisfied himself, earlier in the day, that his aunt had no notion of Constance feeling more than a friendly regard for him.

We often speak of what people have said on such and

such occasions, as if their sayings were deliberate expressions of something seriously felt or thought; whereas nothing is more dependent on locality and surrounding influences, than many of the words which fall from the lips. How common it is to begin an observation in casual talk, and to find, as you speak, that your listener is attaching to it a meaning very different from what you *intended* to convey; and yet so far a true one that you can enlarge upon it in consequence of your perception, from the involuntary propensity to sympathise with associates, which so often lessens the exactness of *all* conversational truth. It was thus with Basil and his aunt. He saw that she misconstrued his manner, and read in it more of indifference than reserve; and even more completely than Constance did he now conceal his feelings.

After this, Miss Hyde, being relieved from all further suspicion, continued to indulge her affectionate heart in talking about Constance almost as enthusiastically, as she was wont to talk of Elinor.

CHAP. XXI.

"I know how one feels when one returns after an absence spent among new faces and under novel circumstances—how new and changed everything then seems to him, and how, more especially, everybody seems to be deficient in warmth and life, because no one is so full of the life of travel as the traveller himself."—SCHLEIERMACHER's *Letters*.

AFTER the first glow of delight in finding herself again at home, Constance felt a strange depression of spirits: it seemed to her that her father and mother were quite indifferent about Burnham; and her own thoughts being more than is usual, even with young visitors, filled with the place and people she had left, it was difficult to refrain from frequent allusion to them. Everything said or done was, in her mind, referred in some indirect way to the Hydes; but Mr. and Mrs. Felton, though fully sensible of their kindness, did not seem to see the propriety of meeting all their possible wishes with the alacrity that Constance was disposed to show.

"My dear, if Miss Hyde really wishes for good hyacinth bulbs, she will get them far better at any nursery garden. Mine are good colours I know, but I think it would be rather officious to send them."

This was Mr. Felton's timely check; and when at breakfast Constance said, "Oh! mamma, I wish you would send Miss Hyde the receipt for these rolls; she said their cook never made them properly;" Mrs. Felton's rejoinder, "My love, any cookery book will furnish her with that," was dry, but undeniably judicious.

And so perceiving that much talk about the Hydes would possibly betray her secret, and certainly weary her hearers, she was obliged to content herself with telling little Mary long stories about Shag when she sat on her lap by the nursery fire. She wondered at the power of such a short interval of time — two common days — for putting such an infinite distance between her and Basil. Two days ago she had known every turn of *his* day; now anything might happen at Burnham, and she would not know of it.

The poor withering flowers that he had given her the last morning, seemed the only things *here* that knew what she felt, for they had been in the dear room where he so often chatted with her — had heard his laugh, and seen how delicious everything was around him: yet she fought bravely against the insidious attacks of memory; the aching blank within she tried to fill up with all her life's old treasures; passing in review her father's love, her wealth of books, her country pleasures, her delight in poetry, her friends — and little Mary; but how shrunk and unavailing seemed now her former joy and pride in all these sweet possessions! One hour more of Basil's society seemed worth more now; for this her heart clamoured impatiently; for this it struggled long, with a faithless neglect of her belief in a special providence.

Again she assured herself several times during those leaden-footed days that it was impossible that the keen passion of regret from which she now suffered should last in its present intensity; — that it *must* yield to the numbing process of time; and this being a piece of wisdom which she had gained by reflection, and not from the mouths of other people, affected her more powerfully than many maxims of which her mind had been but a

passive recipient. By degrees her anticipation was fulfilled, and she began to be more interested in present things, and less taken up with the past.

The sense of "il piacer che passò cangia in veleno," * was not so sharp when she could no longer say to herself: "this day last week we went to the river-side—this time last Sunday he told me his ideas about another world."

But in giving more attention to what was going on around her, she found a little annoyance that was new: everything in the house looked so time-worn,—the furniture so old-fashioned after Burnham rooms: how ridiculously slim the spider-legs of the dining-room sideboard, and what mercilessly high chairs they used at home! These were trifles never noticed before.

Besides this, nothing at home struck her so much or so painfully as the aggrieved complaints of her mother about overcharges, needless extravagances, and the like; it then appeared to her that what we call want of means is the want of a great deal more than means of luxurious living; she felt, by force of contrast, all the significance of the French word *aisance*.

It was a dull time for her altogether. Mary had the whooping-cough, and Miss Tennant, in her kindness of heart, made this a reason for coming to inquire after her nearly every day that the weather allowed; coming to inquire, and staying to talk slowly upon every kind of slow subject: and the outer world offered no pleasant variety either, for it was just at that gloomy time of year when all the cold and darkness of the winter appears to be concentrated upon a bare and snow-ribbed world; all the cheeriness of light swallowed

* Leopardi.

up by thick obscurity in sky and air; and after three o'clock the day is almost as blind as dusky evening.

However, Christmas drew near, and with it the time of Harriet Payne's holidays. She had remained at the same school where Mr. Felton had first placed her, and was now receiving a moderate salary in the capacity of teacher, much esteemed by her employers, and tolerably contented with a position that developed the strongest points of her character. Constance was always glad when she returned, not only from cousinly affection, but because her animated manners made an agreeable change in the torpid quiet of home life; and Mrs. Felton found her a more congenial companion than Constance, who involuntarily fingered a book after the first ten minutes of her kitchen reports. Harriet went eagerly into such matters; she shook her head over the grocery bill, saw how exorbitantly the butcher charged, thought the rate at which candles went quite alarming, and proposed a retrenchment in the servants' allowance of starch, as there could be no need for their petticoats to be so stiff,—which delighted her aunt.

"Harriet is beyond her years in good sense," she sometimes said to Mr. Felton, and generally when Constance could hear her say so.

But though Harriet's energy and good humour were the admiration of her cousin, she was frequently vexed with her for a certain want of refinement; she would chatter to Constance about lovers without the slightest *retenue*, ask her point blank if young Mr. Podmore showed her much attention (happily she had chanced to hear his name mentioned oftener than Basil's), and by and by relate how some one or other had showed the most marked interest in herself. It was a style of conversation which Constance, not having been at school,

would never have supposed any well-bred lady *could* indulge in, and knowing how much her father disapproved of such talk, she tried to stop it, either by repressive silence or by saying, "Oh! Harriet, how *can* you talk of such things?"

"Talk! why not as well as think? and you know every one does *think* whether people care for them or no."

And it was true that while Constance shrunk from what seemed to her a desecration of the subject, and condemned Harriet's theories as "foolish nonsense," she often occupied her thoughts with dreams quite as unwarrantable and far more subtly intoxicating than those which her cousin so lightly and gaily exposed.

In the two letters she had received from Miss Hyde she had found disappointment, for in each she had secretly expected to find some delightful surprise, some message from Basil, which would convey to her much more than his aunt could perceive as she forwarded it, some allusion to him that might confirm her hopes, some inquiry calculated to sound her own feelings. There was no such thing; they were exceedingly kind letters, containing no more mention of Basil than the recital of facts necessitated. No message beyond, "If Basil was in, I am sure he would desire his kind regards to you and Mr. and Mrs. Felton."

She was feeling blank and vexed with self-contempt one morning after reading Miss Hyde's last letter, when Harriet came bustling in with her bonnet on, to say that she was going to the village and should make a point of calling at the school and giving Ann Friars a good scolding for not having come up to thank Constance for her new cloak.

"Pray do no such thing; I particularly dislike to have people's gratitude raked up in that sort of way:

the poor girl will mention it no doubt when I see her, but you know it *is* formidable to come up on purpose to curtsey at me, and say how much obliged she is."

"Ah! but if you knew more of the art of teaching, you would see that it is no use to indulge a false delicacy about that sort of thing; if people cannot take the trouble to say thank you, they don't deserve help."

"Really, Harriet, I think I have had more opportunity of studying poor people's nature than you, and I must beg you not to interfere between Ann and myself."

It was but a trifle they disputed about, yet as a trifle that brought into play some of the chief antagonisms of both natures, antagonisms too deep to emerge without disguise, it was earnestly canvassed, and gave rise to many strong forms of speech.

The little *protégée* of whom they spoke was an orphan transplanted from Mrs. Podmore's visiting district, where no one owned her as a relation. Mr. Felton, hearing her spoken of as an incurable *mauvais sujet* when they were at Clayfield Lodge, volunteered to place her in a very good school at Ashenholt, and if she went on well to get her out into service when old enough; kindness had done its usual work with the poor browbeaten child, and she was now cited at school as a pattern pupil. Her improvement being obvious to all who were interested in her, each benefactor took up his or her share of credit with secret self-gratulation.

"I am glad I had her to read with me," said Mrs. Felton; "it was well spent time!"

"Now people will believe in the use of a little timely indulgence," thought her husband; for this had been his part with regard to the orphan.

Constance meanwhile began to feel a little modest

when Ann was mentioned; not doubting that her good behaviour would be attributed in great measure to *her* influence, after the weeks and weeks of patient toil she had given to her learning and her wardrobe.

But all the time Mrs. Podmore used her as an example of youthful conversion, and seldom named her favourite work, "*An Affectionate Appeal to the Stubborn-hearted,*" without specifying Ann Friars as an instance of its prevailing "unction"; it is true that she had sent it to Ann with a letter that seemed to the ignorant girl like a gratuitous scolding for undreamed-of sins, and the book that came with this letter she naturally never read.

CHAP. XXII.

"Dans son isolement elle s'entoure de chimères; l'imagination dans le silence et la retraite, n'étant frappée par rien de réel, donne une même importance à tout ce qu'elle invente. Elle veut se sauver du présent, et elle se livra à l'avenir, bien plus propre à l'agiter, bien plus conforme à sa nature. L'idée qui la domine, laissée stationnaire par les événemens, se diversifie par le travail de la pensée."—MADAME DE STAËL.

HARRIET had more ways than one of displeasing her cousin's fastidious taste; she gave herself up to supporting the most commonplace talk when silence would have been welcome; she *would* remark upon everything that occurred, thus disturbing the studies and meditations to which Constance was so ardently given, who felt, while hearing her say all sorts of good things, not much less trite than copy-book maxims, by way of useful conversation, that this kind of talk, "though it be a solemn thing, and serves the turn to negotiate between man and man, yet towards inquiry of the truth of things and works it is of no value." *

But Mrs. Felton thought it was of a great deal, and would often summon Constance away from her book to come and have a little rational conversation over their work. Dull work she thought it after Harriet had been with them a week!

Harriet's mind had reached that point of cultivation from which Tupper's "Proverbial Philosophy" is regarded as the *ne plus ultra* of poetic and philosophical

* Bacon.

excellence; and her standard of all intellectual tastes was at about the same height; which, being combined with a very dogmatic turn of expression, made it impossible to converse with her pleasantly on any abstract question.

So Constance conformed as well as she could to the prevailing fashion, and modestly affirmed that black was black, and white white, but still the daily declarations of surprise, and delight, and fear about things too small to ripple the surface of any but an unoccupied mind, were extremely wearisome to her. It was irksome to her to congratulate her mother, as Harriet did, on so-and-so having called just after the furniture covers had been changed, or to interchange gestures of astonishment at seeing their clergyman walk twice past their gate the day after his mother died; — things that neither much pleased nor much surprised her: it seemed a miserable abuse of faculties thus to waste emotion on barren facts, while the inner life, with all its infinite variety, was withering for want of light and culture; it appeared to her about as cheering to keep up this sort of conversation as it would be to sit on the edge of a pond and exclaim with interest at each chip, or straw, or weedy-tangle that floated by on the dead waters. When life is dull she thought it more suitable to let dulness have at least its silence and its calm. She would not have felt the pressure of dulness now so much if hope had not whispered to her its flattering prophecies about a happier home some day, where dulness should never oppress.

The society of Miss Tennant and Harriet, and even her dear kind mother, were in comparison *so* tedious; and yet all the time they seemed much more able to enjoy life than she was. Occasionally she tried to elicit sympathy in her favourite speculations, but as soon as

she did so, she wished her observations unsaid. Harriet's look plainly expressing the reply, "Dear me! how odd you are! We have nothing of that sort at our school." And at once Constance resolved never henceforward to speak to her on any similar subject, settling that she was quite too matter of fact to appreciate her thoughts. She did wrong in so determining; but she had not yet learned that even in dull brains there is often a vague chagrin at being excluded from the intense pleasures of a superior mind, — a latent power, waiting for the magic of affection to arouse by giving it faith in its own existence; and she did not see that by withholding the expression of her deeper feelings and more vivid thoughts from a slower companion, she deprived *herself* of one important means of turning her talents to good account, and gaining a signal blessing upon them. Had she known it, she would have added good humour to patience.

One dim afternoon they had been sitting near the window at work some time, with scarcely more than a minute-gun kind of talk, when Constance hazarded a fanciful notion about the inhabitants of the stars.

"My dear," replied Mrs. Felton, "I never trouble my mind with thoughts about people and things quite apart from our real interests; it only keeps the mind from better employment, and due attention to *present* things." And Constance made no reply: some expressions of opinion form a natural terminus. They worked on in silence a few minutes, and then Harriet began to speak of some patterns of evening dresses that she meant to send for.

"I wish," said Mrs. Felton, with a pondering countenance, "that I *could* recall what material Mrs. Wratislaw told me her cousin wore when she went to Lady F.'s musical party — of course it would be un-

suitable to such quiet people as ourselves; but she told me it was quite a new thing, and very beautiful."

Constance had not been present when it was talked of, and could not therefore help her to remember the name.

The sunny side of Harriet's character showed more when her sailor brother joined the party on Christmas Eve. He had so much adventure to tell them of, brought such life and freshness into all their daily habits, and was altogether such a sensible, merry fellow, that every one felt happier for his presence; even Mr. Felton relaxed a little, and Harriet was in a constant glow of affectionate pride.

Pleasant days followed; long walks in bright frosty air did not tire them too much for a great deal of fun in the evening; and Constance heard so many new facts and new notions from Charlie, that she had much to think of now besides "what are they doing at Burnham?"

But all the time a secret sweetness hid in every thought, for no silence could remove the impression that Mr. Hyde *did* care for her, until one morning she had a short note from his aunt, asking if she could do any commissions for her in London. "I remember," said the kind old lady, "how much you made us laugh by your account of unsuccessful shoppings, and should be glad to do anything for you in that way. We are going to spend a fortnight at my brother-in-law's, and so I shall have good opportunity; Elinor has been in such a hurry to get us there this month, that I suspect she is plotting some attempt upon Basil's heart, but I have not heard who is with her now."

"Pass the toast, please Conny," said Charles Payne. "Bad news, eh?" he added, noticing her paleness.

"Oh no! my letter is only about commissions. Miss

Hyde is so good as to offer to do anything for us in town, mamma," and she read out the first part of the sentence with an air of satisfaction, and then talked about what she might send for in a joking way, and so passed over the sudden pain of the moment.

It was pain that she did not care to analyse; and by the strange power that we have of keeping out of our own sight a feeling which is too painful for recognition, she determined to go on with the day as if nothing had been shaken within. She firmly engaged in a consultation with Harriet about a silk dress she was going to have, (though on such matters Harriet was always so provokingly and triumphantly superior,) she even allowed her to calculate how many yards would be wanted, and to excite herself as to the kind of trimming which she "should say was *indispensable;*" but when all was done, Constance roused herself from a state of languid acquiescence, and said that she would rather wait for Harriet to choose the dress,—she did not like troubling Miss Hyde about such things. (No, it was far too *unideal* a want to be connected with herself in the imagination of a Hyde; a book or drawing-paper was the only purchase she could like to mention); and when Harriet wondered at her irresolution, she was pettish.

She was in that mood when all the little contrarieties of life seemed to goad her to desperation, the puffs of smoke from a fire usually well-behaved, the flying open of a door as soon as she had settled herself at her desk, the entrance of a servant in haste about some work wanted for the school, triffes as they were, just put a finishing stroke to her impatience.

It was an uncomfortable day indoors and out; heavy rain and boisterous wind hindered any walking, and

everybody seemed to Constance in the way of everybody else, always asking to "come by" at a most aggravating moment, for it happened that the drawing-room was that day vacated for a weekly ceremony of housemaid's work; and the smaller breakfast-room was occupied instead: the hall clock had stopped too, and the kitchen clock being under repair, the servants were ever and anon coming in to know the time. It looked as if fate had combined forces to tease the whole family, for the lock of the door of the morning room was out of order, and there was no way of shutting out the draught.

These influences told a little upon every temper, and a quarrelsome tendency was rising all day. No remark seemed to reach hearing unchallenged. Mrs. Felton wondered her husband *could* call it a warm wind; and a few minutes afterwards he declared himself stifled by the heat of the room, and went out.

At dinner-time Harriet jarred with her brother; he expected her to do nothing but mend his clothes in the holidays — a likely thing this in *hers!* — and then Constance, who had come from her room with a face carefully washed from its tears, feeling herself alternately a disguised heroine or a vain fool, made some answer in the vein of Solomon about all things — even holiday happiness — being vanity, and was met by a salvo of rebukes for miserable sentiments; recovering from these, she by and by said something humorous which made them all laugh, and felt vexed at having done so while unable to laugh happily herself. Almost everything that Harriet said that evening irritated her, because Harriet looked so entirely self-satisfied, while she was at variance with herself, and therefore very wretched.

If one of Reichenbach's "sensitives" had been among

them, he would have found the light which *they* say proceeds from each person, turning directly away from the opposite current. After tea Harriet soothed her nerves with music, Charlie found his solace in "Pickwick," Constance in Dante, Mrs. Felton in a knitted toilet cover, and her husband in sleep; all was better then.

CHAP. XXIII.

"Sonderbar,
Dass so viel zum Herzen dringt,
Was man nicht in Worte bringt!"
A. E. Fröhlich.

Basil's visit to the Lees had a contrary effect to that which Constance predicted to herself, when at last she gave audience to her fears; for as he was talking one day with Elinor, she rallied him, as a sister might, on the deep impression that he had made in the autumn; and though he answered, "Who do you mean?" he could not avoid that slight start, which is more felt than seen by the quickest observer, when words have touched upon a theme most interesting to the heart. Elinor saw it, and with all the gentleness of her nature, she only prolonged her *badinage*, lest change of tone should make him feel that it had been observed; but she took care that no wounding expression should escape, and ended by saying, "I would not be guilty of adding to a man's exorbitant vanity, dear Basil, but that I really think she liked you."

"Then you are more fanciful than I!" he replied, laughing. But he believed her; and as soon as April came, and the weather was warm enough for fishing, he wrote to propose a visit to his friend, whose property was in the same county as Ashenholt — some ten miles' distance from it; and a few days later he rode over to

Mr. Felton's. They chanced to meet at the door, and with anything but agreeable candour, Mr. Felton testified only some degree of surprise at seeing him there.

"Miss Hyde is quite well, I hope?" he asked with a little stiffness of manner.

Quite well when he left home for a week's fishing. He hoped Mrs. and Miss Felton were well—and at home?

At home, but very far from well; Mrs. Felton laid up with influenza, and Constance hardly able to come down; however, she was on the drawing-room sofa when her father ushered Basil in.

And so they met, after months that had seemed long to one and full of doubts to another; but Mr. Felton sat by silent and grave, and few words passed between them: indeed poor Constance had so often *imagined* the meeting, and what she should say, and how he would answer, that now she felt quite wordless; she was very hoarse, too, and could take no part in general conversation. Too much engrossed with the insuperable difficulties of a heavy cold to notice any cause of annoyance in her father's manner, she sat surrounded by a heap of shawls, breathing uneasily, and only able to answer with a quiet smile, when Mr. Hyde addressed her with his pleasant low-voiced remarks.

He seemed vexed to hear that the Wratislaws were gone from home for several weeks, asked if the fishing was good near Ashenholt, and gaining nothing by the enquiry, said pointedly that he hoped it was not as good a trout stream as it looked, because he was obliged to get home by the end of the week. The blue eyes opposite looked feverishly bright, and the thin cheeks flushed, so he soon got up, with an apology for his untimely call: in the hall he said he remembered some-

thing that his aunt would wish him to tell Miss Felton, and darting back to the drawing-room (while Mr. Felton put on his great coat), he said to Constance, "Pardon me — for one minute — I wanted to tell you that my aunt and I are coming down to stay with the Murrays this summer; I shall hope then to see you again often — with her, I may be allowed that pleasure, may I not? Good-bye. I grieve to see you so suffering." He spoke hurriedly, but not a word was lost. When he was gone, Constance felt better: she got up and went to the window. The wind blew strongly, and stooped every crocus in the borders; there were the daffodils, only showing their golden beaks (for it was a late spring), and there was the purple periwinkle that she brought from the wood last year unfolding its little stars; she must tell Mary that. She went up to the nursery, and found it strewed with violets and tired daisies, but the child was not there; under the window Mr. Hyde still talked with her father — little Mary in his arms, bonneted for her afternoon walk. Ah! certainly, children do find out who are nice people.

The weeks of April passed quickly: Constance had soon recovered from her cold, and now her happy flow of spirits carried smoothly before it all those daily trifles on which home happiness depends. Her influence in the family circle was as unconscious, soft, and noiseless as the lapse of a roadside streamlet, where you see all the weeds swayed by even-flowing waters in one direction, when the clear stream is running towards the sunshine.

Her nature at twenty-three years old was still very childlike in one particular; she was still almost as much affected by change of season as little children are; the coming of birds, and blossoming of flowers, which in

more stirring lives are mere adjuncts to circumstances of deeper interest, were to her great events. And now the orchards were beginning to thicken with the snowy burden of their bloom, and though light streaks of cloud marked a quicker current of air in the upper sky, not a breath yet stirred in the trees; if a shower of pinky leaves came down, it was from the movement of some eager bird who had sung out its glad thanksgiving, and flew home to the nest with worm or fly, before the last petal reached the ground.

Constance gave herself up to spending as much time as she could "in blessedness, in sunshine, and in flowers;" * she had so much happiness in her heart that she could sympathise with everything beautiful. He had said he was coming again, and hoped to see more of her: the cowslips shudder, bending down by hundreds to the soft thick grass from which they sprung, as the south wind passes by; so did Constance tremble at the remembrance of these words, not from any mixture of fear, but from an excess of delicious emotion. At this time of secret transport, she sometimes felt a kind of compunction for being so happy; it seemed wrong to be so much happier than any around her could be, and she exhausted herself in efforts at being amiable, and more occupied with the feelings of other people than her own.

"Mr. Bland understood dear Conny's ailment certainly; how much good those tonic draughts have done her! she looks quite another creature now!" This was her mother's observation, and Miss Tennent so fully assented that she wondered why he did not order Mrs. Felton to take the same mixture.

* W. Howitt.

CHAP. XXIV.

"Tout passe en province,—là ni relief, ni saillie, mais là des drames dans le silence, là des mystères habilement dissimulés,—là des dénouements dans un seul mot,—là d'énormes valeurs prêtées par le calcul et l'analyse aux actions les plus indifférentes."—BALZAC, *Eugénie Grandet.*

CONSTANCE was leaning out of her window at sunset-time, one evening towards the end of May during a heavy shower of thunder rain: she drank in the fragrance of the sweet-briar—she listened to the deep hiss all round, and watched the leaves and blossoms dipping and rising again under the pattering drops. How midsummer-like all began to look! Such thick darkness of foliage in the trees! Nature's works were now so manifold that even her accustomed eye could not note which day each new flower opened; and now the luxuriance of growth all round her, and the deep greens that showed so well against the cloudy, smoke-coloured sky filled her heart with inexpressible delight.

The door opening, she drew in her head to answer her mother's eager announcement.

"What do you think, Constance? actually papa has been asking Miss Hyde and her nephew to spend the week after next with us! the very week, too, when I wanted the carpets to be taken up!"

"Where did papa meet them?"

"Oh! while he was calling at the Wratislaws in came Mr. Hyde. It seems that he came down to the Murrays

to arrange with them about a summer tour; both he and his aunt are staying there. All very well, as *they are* friends; but why should your father drag them upon *us?* I am sure it was quite uncalled for."

"Dear mamma, you know Miss Hyde and papa used to meet when I was a baby. I think he likes being with any one who remembers those old times; and she is *very* kind and nice — and Mr. Hyde too — I think you will like them."

As the day fixed for their coming drew near, Constance felt almost more anxiety than pleasure; she was nervously eager that everything should be in the nicest state of preparation; wished that the lawn might be mown the morning before, and some new geraniums put in the flower-basket under the drawing-room window; but did not like to say so, lest her father or mother should comment upon such an unusual degree of solicitude. She felt as if they must see her inmost emotions: in a very secluded home this sense of being overlooked and overheard in the most secret recesses of one's soul is inevitable,— there is so much time to study character and motives, that the results of observation, where any is made, are almost infallibly correct.

But in this case her feelings had escaped detection: Mr. and Mrs. Felton knew well that she thought the Hydes perfect in their way, but to their experienced eyes they seemed so entirely of another stamp than their own, that the idea of a possible connection never occurred to either of them; and if they had suspected Constance of a liking for Basil, they would never have guessed how far it had gone already.

Passionate and constant love is now believed in much as ghosts are; people whom we hear speak of it have not perhaps known it themselves, but they have

heard authentic reports of it: even when circumstances have proved its past existence, in looking back, its traces can seldom be ascertained. It is well, it is natural that so great a power should seek to hide itself in darkness; an imperial passion should have an imperial guard, should be able to move about incognito, that it may discover whether any other mind is ready to acknowledge its sway in the dusty suburbs of every-day life. Alas! poor discrowned potentate! wander where you will, few can recognise the kingly lightening of your glance: in your own stately palace, in the boundlessness of imagination you must still live, shrouded from the gaze of those who would only think you a maniac in necessary confinement.

Miss Hyde and her nephew were persuaded by the Murrays to take part in an archery meeting that fell on the day they had fixed for coming to Ashenholt, and they would not arrive till late. The evening was in its second stage of beauty; cool grey had succeeded to gold; the roses hung in the still dewy air with an ineffable loveliness; and Constance watched them from the window instead of going out as usual to stroll about the garden. In times of great shyness and heart-beating the circumscribed limits of a room seemed to her a sort of protection.

It was a long interval of waiting, and the minutes before the door-bell rang appeared just as long and far from the critical moment of arrival as all those of the preceding hour, when she had listened and watched in vain till her whole frame grew faint and cold.

She had given herself a little treat upstairs, to celebrate the eventful day,—a twist of briony wreathed across the looking-glass, and a cup full of shell-pink dog roses in front of it; she arranged with her own

heart that one of these roses should be put by and dried, and dated if the evening was a happy one. It was not, and she looked at her little adornings with tearful eyes when she came up to bed.

Her father had been *very* silent; her mother manifestly fussed; Miss Hyde rather syllabic and stiff (in reality so tired that she could hardly talk); and even Basil seemed a little out of sorts and puzzled; while Constance, feeling for them all, was too anxious and uneasy to promote conversation agreeably.

How different were her feelings now from those of last spring, when she met him at the Wratislaws. She was then simply glad to see him, and had been in such gay spirits, talking and laughing at the opposite side of the table, with no consciousness of his presence, except this—that it was pleasant, that she would like more of it,—but it did not lay a feather's weight upon her heart; she was then free, and glad, and unfettered; *now*, how solemn she felt, and at the mercy of every little accident to which the heart could attach importance.

Mr. Felton had been out of spirits this evening, and with the best and most hospitable intentions his welcome had been somewhat repelling. There is a coldness of manner, and of feeling too, that naturally results from want of means; the wishes of the heart are perforce thwarted in so many ways that at last it adopts a habit of indifference by way of blunting pain.

Mrs. Felton did not class bad dressing among *domestic virtues*, as many women do, but she certainly thought it one of the privileges of home to wear the ugliest things that her wardrobe could afford. On this occasion, however, she wished to make a pleasing difference, and put on a very wonderful cap, and wore it with perfect

satisfaction, for it was quite new, and, as she believed, in unexceptionable taste. Emma, the maid, had imagined and executed this curious *coiffure*, and saw it on the head of her dear mistress with honest pride. Miss Hyde saw it too, and thought it a most singular phenomenon.

Basil was desirous that everything at Ashenholt should please his aunt, and he was pained if any trifle jarred with her taste. His own had been slightly bruised at tea-time.

"Did you hear of Mr. Murray's accident out riding the other day?" he had said, addressing his hostess.

"No! what was it?"

"Why, his horse startled and reared as one of those gipsy carts—houses on wheels—came by, and he was very nearly thrown under the wheels; he *was* off and ——"

"Ah! they are dangerous things; not so bad though as little carts drawn by dogs. I remember once, when I and my sister were driving, one of these startled our ponies dreadfully; they galloped off for a mile or two, we could hardly hold them in at all, and at last came up dash against a high wall. But I hope Mr. Murray was not hurt?"

"Slightly, madam," replied Basil with almost a frown, as he turned away from her.

Constance, with a kind of double consciousness, felt the rudeness with a deeper vexation than his own.

The breakfast the next morning was not much better; some imp of malice would for ever draw Mrs. Felton's eye or finger to her dress, which she began to suspect was a little too much out of date; and a furtive pluck, given now and then to redress flatness of folds and awkwardness of fit, only succeeded in giving them

fuller display; then she was nervous and asked questions at random, and looked to see what the servant was bringing in while her guests looked up to answer.

Constance had no inclination to eat, and sat by wondering at her father's persevering appetite; while Miss Hyde pleasantly quoted some little *bon-mot*, or Basil related a hair's-breadth adventure, Mr. Felton continued a steady clearance of his plate, bating not a jot from any interest he took in conversation. It looked like an animal propensity to the Hydes, it *was* the result of unbroken mental habits,—of a pursuit (unrelaxed by wayside diversions) usually given to matters worthy of close application, and now, from the invariable tyranny of habit, carried on in matters quite indifferent. Constance noticed this now because she was *en rapport* with people who felt it strongly, beneath an impenetrable mask of politeness. It is thus that we know much of what passes in other minds, not from the index of manner, but by the clairvoyance of excited nerves.

CHAP. XXV.

"Alle nobil maniere affisso poi,
Alle rare virtuti, al gran valore;
Ragionarmi pian piano odo nel core;
Quant' ai ben collocato i pensier tuoi."—ARIOSTO.

"For dulness—though he might abhor it—
In them he made allowance for it."—SHENSTONE.

A LONG and beautiful drive restored the general equilibrium, and Basil and Constance had been previously made aware of their *entente cordiale* by a very trifling incident. Little Mary met him in the garden, and running up to his side, asked with confidential earnestness, "Is your dog Shag quite well? and shall I ever see him sit up?"

Her sister was walking a few steps in advance with Miss Hyde, but turning round to hear what Mary said, she met his eye and his smile: he was pleased to find the child had heard enough about his dog to ask after it—to him the fact spoke volumes. So the drive was very charming. Mrs. Felton remained at home; she was full of household cares, and in a suppressed paroxysm about "the sweets" for the second course, till Constance returned and assured her that Miss Hyde never seemed to care about such things at home.

Unluckily, that very day Emma sprained her ankle, and so badly, that the doctor forbade all movement. Mrs. Felton was in despair, for Dennis had been given

up as a measure of economy; but recruits were summoned from the village — a charwoman, and a lad who had gone out to wait at Christmas-time once or twice, and could just get through a dinner without smashes; but he was still very much aware of his white Berlin gloves, and coasted round each person to whom he handed a dish with apologetic hesitation and far-stretched arm. Mr. Felton smiled in grim composure, whilst watching the process. Constance tried to prompt the youth about the order of handing things, and only drew attention to her anxiety and his dulness by an emphatic *sotto voce* "the *potatoes* to *Miss Hyde.*"

In the upper regions the next morning the deputy-housemaid, a tall, stooping woman, was stepping about heavily-booted; she was met at all corners, with all her apparatus of service, and when out of sight, made herself heard by going down the back stairs with a noisy jingle, and very deliberate tread.

Poor Constance, sitting in the drawing-room with Miss Hyde and Basil, had just forgotten all about her, when the door opened, and the charwoman put in first her head, and then her hand, and at last her whole rough person, to give up a note from the rectory.

"Why should she be in that dreadful little shawl?" Constance thought. (Char-people always do wear something over and above a gown, — perhaps nervousness makes them chilly, or darns and slits may need an external fence.)

When the door closed again, she told all the burden of their domestic trouble to kind Miss Hyde. Basil laughed heartily; his laugh was such happy music, and he had so many pleasant things to say about the crisis, that for a time her vexation was allayed; but when, some few hours later, she went into the dining-room

with a message for her father, who was sitting there with Basil, she found Mrs. Deavy laying the cloth for luncheon, and saw that at each turn she took round the table she managed to stumble against Basil, or something in close proximity to him, with an ever-recurring bob, and an "a' beg pardon, Sir," though he did not seem to mind it any more than her father, who sat opposite to him, it gave her momentary chagrin.

Mr. Felton had drawn Basil aside to consult him about a newly-devised plan for draining, which he thought of trying in part of his grounds, and though his guest assured him with unfeigned modesty, that he knew little or nothing about such things, Mr. Felton still wished to tell him the exact state of the fields he intended draining, and his reasons for thinking that plan would answer; and Basil was a patient listener to whatever the father of Constance could say.

When a visitor enters a household that has few outlets to the world, its inmates have a tendency to honour him either with a disguised show-off of their own abilities, if they are vain, *i. e.* uncertain of how they may stand in the world's eye, and wanting to be confirmed in their self-appreciation; or, by what is much more common in good and well-bred people, by making the guest a temporary Solomon, and plying him with as many questions as five Queens of Sheba could propound. It is very natural; the visitor stands for the wide enlightened world, and is, therefore, supposed to have on all subjects an opinion worth hearing.

In the drawing-room Miss Hyde was benevolently attending to a problem of some difficulty upon the question of school regulations; and as village schools were a hobby of hers, she and Mrs. Felton conversed with real eagerness.

After luncheon there was too much threatening of a storm for a drive to be proposed, and Mr. Felton having retreated without apology to his study, Basil remained in the drawing-room with the ladies. He amused Mary some time by drawing pictures of Shag in various attitudes, engaging her sister in conversation meanwhile.

Presently Miss Tennent was announced. She came in with lengthy explanation of protracted absence; she feared dear Mrs. Felton might have wanted her for village business, but to-day she had brought her work-bag, full of little frocks,—she had, indeed, and a sack could hardly have held more,—and she would stay the afternoon if it was agreeable, and then dear Miss Constance would perhaps help in the good work. Mrs. Felton did like her to stay (a kind of humble echo like Miss Tennent's soothed her nerves), but certainly Constance would not do much needlework; she was showing a collection of valuable engravings to the Hydes, and thinking, "*What* ill fate brought up poor Miss Tennent to-day! how tediously she will gossip about him now."

"Poor relation," thought Basil, "symptoms of grateful dependence," and he placed a chair for her with kindly and graceful alacrity.

Constance went back to the portfolio as soon as the party were resettled; but though Miss Tennent was ostensibly occupied by hearing both from Mrs. Felton and Miss Hyde what rules they had about needlework at Burnham School, Constance was aware that each word and look of hers and Basil's were undergoing the strictest analysis in the mind of the prosy old maid. However, Miss Tennent could not possibly hear half that Basil said, because he spoke so low. They were looking at some views in Sicily.

"What a beautiful country it must be; why do not people go there oftener?" Constance said. "I wonder you do not strike out a newer line, Mr. Hyde, and go to Sicily this summer, instead of taking the regular Italian tour you propose?"

"Some day, perhaps, I shall. I could not go to Syracuse with common travelling companions. I must either be by myself, or with some one loved much better than self, in places so steeped with romance;—would *you* like to go some day Miss Felton?"

She was spared the necessity of an answer, for at that instant Mrs. Felton came up and said, "Will you run and see what your father wants, dear Conny, I hear him calling at his study door; that stupid boy has not yet learned the different bells, I dare say he went upstairs when your father rang. Mr. Hyde will not mind turning over the prints alone I am sure."

Constance went, and Basil thought the interruption intentional; he fancied his words overheard, but they were not; Mrs. Felton was too much engrossed with the conversation on her side of the room to heed what passed elsewhere.

Basil carelessly whisked through several pages of the portfolio, his pride on fire, his penetration quite at fault; and then going to his aunt, he inquired if she had any message to Saunders (the outdoor factotum of Burnham), he was going to write to him about a horse that was to be sold in Dorking next week. But before he could reach the writing-table, Miss Tennent intercepted him to ask if he ever was in Dorking.

"Often."

"Did he know a Mr. John Gay, who lived about a mile out of the town?"

"*A* Mr. Gay sometimes was at the cover side," and

Basil had to answer a long series of questions before Miss Tennent could satisfy herself that it was *her* Mr. Gay. When sure that it was, what then? what the upshot of this discovery? Why, that a cousin of her's knew Mr. Gay very well indeed.

Basil's courtesy was a little out of order, but—could he take any message to the cousin through Mr. Gay's intervention, or from the cousin to Mr. Gay? Oh! no. Miss Tennent did not even know this cousin by sight; she only wanted to find out, it seemed such an *extraordinary* chance that Mr. Felton's visitor should know her distant cousin's friend—acquaintance she should say.

Basil's pen dashed away with all the energy of released impatience; and though Constance soon returned, he thought of other letters that he must write at once, and would not lift his eyes towards that part of the room where she sat. Both, in their own fashion, were musing on the same theme—both had felt within a minute's reach of perfect understanding; but he believed his advances undesired by the parents at least, and she had no modern notions of being her own interpreter. He had studied this subject in the world, and the modern world had taught him not to venture upon a profession of attachment till the lady had *clearly* indicated that she fully intended to accept; in fact he was unwilling to compromise his pride before her own had been sacrificed. Constance, on the other hand, in woods and shady fields, in companionship with books, full of chivalric sentiment, and with a generous and most delicate mind, had meditated upon the unfairness of a woman biassing the free choice of a man by evidencing her preference, and she was resolved that Basil should have no impulse from her manner, no

sideways pull to hasten his decisive words; of his love she no longer doubted, and must he not divine hers from her very reserves, her silence, her frequent unconquerable diffidence when he was present? Alas! she reckoned on a discernment not common; perhaps only an indifferent, or a *very* vain, or a similarly educated man could have regarded her manner in the light in which she thought Basil *must* see it. And yet every day that they passed together, while it increased her attachment, revealed more and more of difference in all their habits of thought. When they were all together in the hayfield, she noticed that Basil seemed to enjoy the lounge on sweet heaps of warm grass, and the fun of burying little Mary in a hay prison, and perhaps of sitting near *her* while she worked; but he seemed blind to the fringe of meadow-sweet a few yards off, and did not find out the forget-me-nots farther down till Mary asked him to get some to put in her little hat.

The quiet life of Constance had subdued her tastes almost to those of an invalid; she had looked on nature in its smallest details, such as are within reach of every country home, more than in its finer, grander scenes; she had soothed the impatience of many a half-hour spent with uninteresting people, by closely watching the flittings of free birds, the mazy dance of gnats in the sunlit gaps of leafy trees,—the soft flutter of silvery moths over meadows newly mown; but as she walked with her father and Basil the last evening he was with them, listening to his rapturous account of Alpine scenery, she felt *how* unlike in feeling he must be to her after experience so dissimilar to hers. He strode on beside her through the heavy quietude of the wood, regardless of the tangled flowers and grasses leaning on each side of their path, and beginning to welcome the dew with

their sweetest scents; and when they gained the home-field, and, facing the west, met the white glare of a past sunset, broken by the black tracery of bordering trees, Constance sighed,—all this said nothing to him; he had not even a look of interest for the scenes which had been her only vivid pleasure for so many days. Those tree-tops! how often the wind stirring in them had been there the only moving thing except herself for an hour or two at a time; and how often had she thought of Basil, while she watched them swaying to and fro, till stars shone out beyond. Truly his life was in a different sphere.

CHAP. XXVI.

"Von dir, O Liebe, nehm' ich an
Den Kelch der bittern Leiden;
Nur einen Tropfen dann und wann,
Nur einen deiner Freuden."—JACOBI.

IT requires a great quickness of imagination to perceive what our companions feel with regard to things and people that do not similarly affect ourselves. Mrs. Felton woke up the day after the Hydes left Ashenholt with a comfortable feeling that *now* they would be themselves again, and need not use the best breakfast service; and whilst dressing she settled that she and Constance could go on with their review of the table linen: "We can have a nice long day's work," she thought, at the very moment when Constance, hearing the silvery tinkle of teaspoons in the room below, where breakfast things were being laid, sighed to remember how wearily long every hour would appear to-day.

It was curious how much, and yet how little, Mrs. Felton had known of her step-daughter's feelings, during the last week; some things seem to come *half* in sight of our mind's vision, and then, hardly recognised, to vanish altogether. When Basil had been in the house a day, she began to ponder whether he *did* care for Constance, but seeing nothing positively symptomatic, and being much taken up with his aunt, she forgot to

notice his manner, and at last, not hearing that anything had passed between them—as people say, when so much goes quicker than a carrier pigeon between two interested hearts, she dismissed the notion as untenable, and it seldom came into her head to divine what was not seen.

When the first public leave-takings were over, she remembered that she had promised to show Miss Hyde their dairy—an institution of which her husband was so proud, that he followed the ladies to exhibit its peculiar advantages; and so Basil had time to turn back again to Constance, and ask "May I gather a rose from your arbour? It will live longer with me than it could on the stem,"—and in her remembrance longer still. That full-hearted, delicious rose, which she saw him take so eagerly, was to her a pledge of happiness to come, and she forgot that the heart may have a winter longer than nature's and far more cruel and severe. And though a few minutes after the rose was gathered, she watched him drive away, with cold hands, and a cheek as pale as if Miss Hyde had not kissed her repeatedly on saying good-bye, yet little could she think *then* that a time could come, even sixteen years distant from the present, when she would say, in answer to some stranger's inquiry about the Hydes, "Yes, I once knew a Mr. Basil Hyde," it would have seemed then as possible so to speak of her own soul.

Why he had not spoken more plainly of his own feelings she could not understand, but as many little proofs had made her sure of mutual affection, his caution did not trouble her. She knew little of the ways of the world, and thought an implied wish quite as valid as one outspoken; she fancied they understood each other so well, that perhaps he felt as sure of her as she did of

him, and with an unbounded reverence for his wisdom, and a child-like trust in Providence, she put aside all past misgivings, and rested securely upon hope. And thus to her simple confiding nature it was true that "en amour un silence vaut mieux qu'un langage;"* for silence left her that shelter for strong feeling which timidity always craves.

Though Basil was soon going to Italy, they had a chance of meeting again before he started, for he had told her that if weather was propitious, Mrs. Wratislaw had promised to invite him and his aunt to a pic-nic, and had mentioned the Feltons among those whom she hoped would be of the party.

So now the weather was closely watched; after several weeks of delightful days a cold change had followed, and when the Feltons were again alone, the earth and sky looked coarse-complexioned, rough and discoloured, with buffeting winds, and heavy chilling rain. Basil was gone, and the very garden seemed to feel it; how dull and unoccupied every road and hedge-side appeared to Constance, everything had a dreary look she thought, —to her it seemed hardly worth while for any one else to be about,—and the house—how unrelentingly quiet and plain were all its goings on now! how uninteresting even her favourite bookcase, from which he would not again pull down one book after another to find such passages as it pleased him most to read with her. She had, however, the consolation of being able to hear him spoken of a great deal, and could occasionally insinuate her own quintessence of praise unobserved.

In secluded families a fresh acquaintance, if at all agreeable, is like a new and delightful scent, which pleases so much that everything is perfumed with it;

* Pascal.

everything said or done for some time after the refreshing change, savours of the new person,—he or she said or thought so and so; and what was said or thought is for a while quoted as worth hearing.

More favourable to expectants than it usually is, the weather recovered itself towards the end of June, just as Constance began to think it hopeless. Mrs. Wratislaw hastened to take advantage of the change, and collected all the sociable neighbours she could muster: the Hydes were already at her house when the Ashenholt trio were shown into the crowded drawing-room, for the guests were to make that their *rendezvous* before they set out to the forest.

The Hydes were there, but Constance was not much the happier for their presence; she was that day under a spell of painful nervousness,—a mere fancy that her father had noticed and strongly disapproved her anxiety for the day's amusement, began to paralyse her nerves, —a sudden conviction that he detected the cause of this anxiety made matters worse, and the unrestrained stare (as soon as she entered the room), of two or three young ladies, to whom she was a stranger, completed her discomfiture.

It is true that Mr. Felton *had* noticed that in speak- of Mr. Hyde as they drove along, Constance paused, and that her face took a sudden light, as it seemed from some delightful image placed before her mind's eye; he saw that at least Mr. Hyde stood in an ornamental page of her memory, and a few grave thoughts passed through his mind in consequence of this observation; but Mr. Felton was not a man to occupy himself with anything so impalpable as a *possible* liking in his daughter's heart, and he soon passed on to realities and certainties; his gravity meaning reprehension as

little as the stranger eyes intended scorn; the young ladies were only looking to see whether the sort of mantle Constance wore was of the same cut as those their dressmaker recommended.

Still Constance was not herself; and when the Hydes came up to shake hands, she felt as if she looked guilty, and a wretched fluttering within almost deprived her of voice. Basil had before witnessed the same painful and unaccountable seizure, and to-day, when he hoped to see her in full enjoyment, he could not guess what was the matter. Her conversation being usually pointed, and closely adapted to the occasion, these fits of causeless embarrassment betrayed a degree of secret discomposure which it was impossible rightly to interpret; (a nature less sincere would not have betrayed it so immediately,—the transparent tissue is most easily suffused by an unnatural colouring); but now her misplaced words, and evidently wandering thoughts displeased him more than any fault of temper ever would; they appeared to him the result of insincerity, quite foreign to the intrepid simplicity which was her usual characteristic; and what she felt to be a miserable infirmity, he judged as a grave fault, and she *felt* that he so misjudged, which increased it.

It was a relief to be again in the outer air, driving rapidly to their shady meeting-place some four miles off. Basil was riding beside the carriage, and talked whenever he could to Constance or Mrs. Felton. A Miss Murray, the daughter of his friend, was riding too; a good-natured girl of fourteen, with whom he had made a secret compact, that if he could persuade Miss Felton to ride back in the evening, her horse should be lent for the purpose, and she should take the vacant seat in the Feltons' carriage, "which," as he cunningly

explained, "will give you some rest Marian, and Miss Felton a pleasant variety. She does not ride much, I know," he added, "but your pretty Bessie is quiet enough for any one."

When Constance was told of this plan, she had regained courage, and gave a glad consent. It was a blissful afternoon to her; golden light within and without; much gaiety; much of that sort of conversation which glances near the depths of feeling, and yet never near enough to agitate; and all in a framework of woodland loveliness.

After dinner the party separated in different groups; Miss Hyde rested under an oak tree; Constance and Marian Murray and Basil penetrated far into the green tangle to gather armsful of fern to make a soft cushion for her to lean on; for she had begun to call herself too old for pic-nics. But the fern was a long time in coming, and when the gatherers returned the dear old lady was sure that they must be tired, and begged them to sit down awhile and have some rest before they rambled on.

Marian was too much of a child to bring any strong influence into the little coterie, and as they sat round Miss Hyde, Constance felt as if she was again at Burnham; the same sort of things were talked of that used to interest her there; and it was a pleasure to hear the *dramatis personæ* of that delightful scene spoken of again familiarly. She asked about the Ellises and the Deanes. Mrs. Deane was as tedious as ever, but they had seen more of her during the winter because her husband was very much out of health, and she seemed in want of cheering. Captain Ellis had married one of the Cartarets. Constance had not seen them; were they near neighbours?

"No," said Miss Hyde; "they live at some little distance from us, and yet I often wish them still farther off; they're not the kind of people *I* like, but they made a dead set at us, and Basil often yields to their frequent dinner invitations. I seldom go; the girls would soon talk me to death."

Constance glanced shyly towards Basil; he was plucking up little sprigs of wild thyme with a contemplative air, and took a piece of grass out of his mouth to say,—

"I think you are prejudiced against them, aunt."

"Oh! my dear, there is enough to make me dislike them without prejudice: can anything be more frivolous than Miss Anne Cartaret?"

"She is frivolous, but she has had so many disadvantages that one ought to make some allowance; besides, *you* must grant that she is quite free from all cant."

"True, that is not in her line; sometimes I wish that she was a little more serious."

"Well, aunt, I cannot defend her frivolity, but if people are fond of gaiety and show I do like them to be honest about it, and not to dress up their vanities in humbug. Now that is just what provokes me at Clayfield Lodge; to see those poor girls forced to sham all sorts of things they don't feel; and I wish to goodness old Podmore would not talk of travelling Zionwards so often! You used to tell me about going to heaven when I was a boy, why won't that do still? and then his '*Wells of Baca*' and '*Ebenezers;*' his grotesque use of allegorical figures with regard to a life so mercilessly practical, I declare some of those expressions make me feel quite sick."

"Hush! hush! my *dear* Basil, do pray use expressions less strong on sacred subjects."

"But I say they are *not* sacred, they are no more

connected with real piety than a wig is with the head; it's a lot of cant phrases tacked togther to look like religious feeling, which, as you know, is often not felt by those who use them most, just as you know the wig is stuck on the head and is *not* growing hair, when some hasty movement has pushed it on one side and the bald old head is showing out. Pshaw! I've seen strong passions,—the old Adam, as they call it, toss off the wig in a minute, and then what use is it to comb it down flat on the forehead with hope of it being mistaken for hair?"

Marian laughed and Miss Hyde looked vexed, but Constance said, "I know so well what you mean—too well—by my own experience, but, indeed, I often wish I was as good and patient as Mr. Podmore."

"Patient he is, truly, and I quite agree with you, a good old fellow; if he would not chat about religion so much I should thoroughly respect him. By the way, are you going there this year?"

"No; I have a long visit to make at my uncle's, in an opposite direction."

"That good, wise uncle you told me of?"

"Ah! no, I wish it was," replied Constance, blushing with pleasure at his remembrance. "No; *he* lives in Wales, and I have to go first to my other uncle."

"And when do you go, my dear?" asked Miss Hyde.

"In July."

"I suppose we shall be off to the continent by the first or second week in July," said Basil. "Do you not wish Miss Felton could come with us, Marian? I think she could keep you in better order than mamma does."

Marian longed for the day of departure; wished Miss Felton could come; was sure every one ought to travel; did not wonder that people envied her, she was *such* a

lucky girl to be going; and so ran on, while Miss Hyde fell into a dignified doze, and poor Constance listened with something more pathetic than envy at her heart.

"I *wish* you could come!" said Basil at the first pause.

"Well *we* are come, at all events," cried a shrill voice behind them, from a party who had approached unperceived. It was a rustling bevy of young ladies, escorted by an old beau, all strangers to Constance, who came to remind Mr. Hyde of his morning promise to show them a very beautiful spot in the forest. "And we cannot let you off, Mr. Hyde, though you seem so charmingly situated here; can we, Matilda? What a divine day it is Miss Hyde," continued the enterprising spokeswoman. "Oh, Miss Murray, I beg your pardon, I did not see *you* down there too; your mamma has been looking about for you some time."

"Mrs. Murray knows she is with me safe enough, thank you," said Basil, who had sprung to his feet with a frown. "You will come with us, Marian? Do you care for a longer walk, Miss Felton?"

No; Constance would rather stay with his aunt; he thanked her for doing so, and contrived to say, as the walking set filed off, "Remember the riding plan, please," and in a lower voice still, "I have something I wanted to ask you about—all-important to me; but it is a long story."

"What a pity it is that dear Basil is so good-natured," said Miss Hyde, when he was out of sight, "how *could* he get entangled with those forward girls? Now they will beset him for the rest of the day, and bore him to exhaustion."

"I don't think Mr. Hyde could help himself," Constance replied, "they came resolved to capture."

CHAP. XXVII.

"But what on earth can long abide in state?
Or who can him assure of happy day?
Sith morning fair may bring foule evening late,
And least mishap the most blisse alter may."—SPENSER.

THE exploring ramble which Basil undertook, lasted much longer than he expected, and his patience hardly as long; one of his companions fell over the stump of a tree, and was frightened and got faint, and wanted a great deal of soothing and reassuring before she would change her opinion about having broken a bone; and when that delusion was overcome, she was glad of Mr. Hyde's arm, and could not go as fast as the others, and yet would not hear of turning back, and giving up the object of their walk, — and thus he was on duty with her, vexed at the delay, but bound to linger as much as she desired, long after the rest of the pic-nickers were assembled at tea; and tea was drunk, and the dew began to fall before he could possibly rejoin them.

Constance saw her mother beginning to tie her bonnet, and look towards her, with secret apprehension, and soon she heard her say to Mr. Felton, "My dear, I don't want to be late, Conny looks *so* pale, and it is getting too damp for her;" and then there was a little talking and nodding between Mrs. Felton and Mrs. Wratislaw,—and then her father came up, and told her to be ready, for *she* was to drive back in the Wratislaw's

close carriage, with one of their elderly guests, and the others would follow soon.

"Oh, but I was to *ride* home, dear papa! Miss Murray offered to lend me her horse, and I should like it *so* much. Oh! do let me wait; I don't feel it at all damp."

"No, no; after the toothache you had last week, you are much better in doors, and as for the riding, its nonsense; you can hardly ride by day, and it will be night before ——"

"Mr. Hyde said I could," she spoke imploringly but in vain, for Mrs. Felton now added the weight of her injunctions; and her anxious tones when saying "my love, I wish it to be so" made the decision final.

A poor young governess, who stood near them, taking charge of two disagreeable, spoiled children, chanced to overhear what was going on between Constance and her parents: how enviable she thought her! there was no one to be solicitous about herself—no one to fear night air for her own weary frame; and here was a daughter looking unhappy because tender love put an obstacle to this trifling wish.

But sometimes a trifling disappointment has results that will be felt for life: and Constance turned her head again and again towards the forest, as the carriage drove off, with an intensity of boding regret; if she could but have left a message to explain to Basil why she went! if his aunt had but seen how it happened!—but she was not even able to see her before leaving, for Mr. Felton hurried her into the carriage before she could reach her side of the scattered group: never mind, they would probably meet again at supper, for that was still to take place at Mr. Wratislaw's: never mind, Basil would guess how it was — he had seen enough of

her home life to understand, — he always divined her real feelings: — alas! had there then been indeed that spiritual communion and thorough understanding she fancied there was, her fate for life had been different.

In spite of all her reasonings the disappointment was very great: this twilight ride had been the hope of her day; and she had so many things ready to say to Basil, on subjects she had longed to touch before, but could not in the full light of day, and his brilliant eyes: and he had a special communication for her too; for *that* there would be no opportunity now, but she thought she could certainly remove any wounding impression made by her apparent change of purpose, — she thought she could! Did she not yet know that there is a spirit who is charged to baffle all such expected satisfactions, — the demon of thwarting, who in all things achieves our defeat, by petty and persistent contrariety, not suffering people to come when expected, or to be near each other for weeks or months, after a day of mistakings from mutual embarrassments which one quiet five minutes would end? She soon *would* know the large business *this* agent of heaven carries on, and may at last learn to give it the due honours of submission, but then she was driving away from Basil, white with chagrin, and yet not so unhappy as she would have been had she known that she should not see him again for eleven months.

"Dear Miss Felton, how *very* pale you look!" sighed the asthmatic old lady beside her.

"I am rather tired."

"Yes, you look unfit for much exertion I am sure; a quiet sofa life is best, I doubt, for such as you and I."

Anything more kindly meant by the speaker, and more painfully felt by the hearer, could not have been said; but Constance answered smiling,

"Indeed, I am not such an invalid creature as you think me, I am only knocked up with the heat, and the long day." While she thought, "perhaps Miss Hyde is saying the same sort of thing about me to *him!*"

Neither of them returned to supper: after Constance had supported a dialogue of courteous dulness with her companion for more than an hour, Mrs. Wratislaw came in with the Feltons, and said that Miss Hyde had charged her with her good-byes to Constance, and had begged her to say how vexed she was to find her gone: Miss Hyde would not come back to the house, for both she and Mrs. Murray seemed tired, and Mr. Hyde too was quite as well pleased to get home at once, he said. Marian was perfectly fagged with their endless walk with those Miss Thickleys, — indeed he looked so himself — I never saw *him* so silent — oh! here those girls come, so I must go and get ready for supper.

Supper was a flat concern; almost every one's spirits were a little run down, except the Thickleys, who kept up a permanent rapture about their "charming stroll with that delightful Mr. Hyde." And Constance had to listen, and use words of appropriate meaning, while she felt a mortification that pride could scarcely conceal. She was glad of darkness as they drove back to Ashenholt.

When morning came she could reconsider yesterday's vexation more quietly; it need not be her last meeting with the Hydes — at least with Basil — they were to stay three days longer at the Murrays, and he could do anything he liked there, could certainly ride over to Ashenholt; indeed she quite expected he would do this, and her spirits rose. None but her guardian angel could have perceived the signs of expectation which disturbed her equipoise throughout the day: she read

n the Bible during a part of every day; to-day she studied it with peculiar care (for all true love drives us back to the source of life and love). She was always neat; to-day she arranged books and chairs in the drawing-room several times over, but Basil did not come. She told herself it was therefore all the more probable that he would the next day; but the next day no one came. On the third — though aware that it was extremely unlikely he should spend the last day of his visit to a very old friend in taking a long ride to call upon one comparatively new, she still listened, still hoped, still excused herself from driving or walking beyond the garden, pleading fatigue; and tired enough she was, though not with bodily exercise.

In the evening she chose out a volume of poetry most passionately sad, hoping to loosen the load on her heart with poetic emotion, hoping for softening tears,— in vain; the grief that she read of was distanced by imaginative skill; what she *felt* clung close to every minute of the lonely present, and could not be distanced. That long day had brought round each of its hours in all the gradations of increasing and lessening light, and not one of them had brought Basil.

The nightfall upon earth was not more heavily obscure, than doubt and grief upon her desponding mind. And the next morning everything looked *so* beautiful, so transcendently pure and calm; her heart ached to think that no joy answerable to such a prelude was likely to be ushered in; — only the common events of a common dull week day.

It was a very hot one, and she could complain of the heat as a plausible reason for languor. Clippings of shrub and tree were going on that sultry day all over the garden; the shrubbery was strewed with evergreen

litter. Constance heard the click of the shears, and the drowsy talk of the gardener and his boy with a sad sort of feeling; every one was so busy still, and Basil had left the neighbourhood, and she was going about in her old ways, unnoticed in the routine of home life: she looked at the still grey clouds and thought them enviably free, and when at sunset they rolled off in a grand cloud-procession, she longed for access to their far-off kingdom, as if it might bring her nearer to him.

One more day passed, and she was quite sure he had left the county; — the Hydes were seldom longer than they intended anywhere but at home. Yes; they were gone, without sending letter, or message, or any other simple expedient for intimating remembrance and affection. "Basil must be angry with me," she thought, "if I could *but* explain to him!"

So thinking, she sat down and wrote at length to his aunt, telling her as cautiously as she could how disappointed she had been, and though she ventured to add "pray tell Mr. Hyde that papa would not hear of my riding home," it seemed so miserable to be unable even now to send him any other message, that tears poured down as she wrote.

It is the same with spiritual as with geographical nature, distance gives to remote objects a seeming nearness to each other; — looking across country towards a hilly horizon, several hills that are sundered by valleys and wide fields seem immediately contiguous; — sending your letter to one in a family where your relations with another of its members are obscure, you think that what you can say without reserve to your public correspondent, must, of course, be communicable to others of the party, when, in truth, perhaps, it was much easier for you to make a confidential remark or a painful an-

nouncement to her, than for her to pass it on; so widely do tempers, and little intricacies of family diplomacy divide near relatives. Basil never got the message Constance sent him: Miss Hyde, easily intimidated by the slightest exhibition of his warm temper, avoided any allusion to the subject;—for she had seldom seen him more put out than he had been the evening of the pic-nic; he did not explain why, but spoke angrily even to her, when asking if she had seen Miss Felton before she left, and never recurred to anything that had passed on that day. When he took leave of Mr. and Mrs. Felton under the trees, she fancied his manner haughty and distant; but without a key to his feelings, she could interpret nothing. She thought silence was both safe and soothing, and therefore she did not even mention that she had heard from Constance at all. Her letter was in vain so far; but writing it had occupied at least an hour when time was very burdensome.

There are days when the heart is in such a heavy storm that its course veers and shifts about from side to side like a distressed vessel; when one thinks in looking back upon it, "at ten I tried to throw down my last hope, at twelve I was struggling with despair; later in the day a kind of apathy came to my relief; at sunsetting I resolved to distract my grief with a fine piece of poetry, and failed; but about eight o'clock, thank heaven! a humble, holy feeling was given to me, and I wept." Constance was in this state to-day, and more suffering was got into an hour now than she had felt for weeks previously. She tried to read; the Bible was her first resource; but to every passage she read her heart answered with miserable indifference, "Yes, I know all that, but it does not help me now." Then she took up other books of irresistible power in happier

moods; they were cold and dull now, and she closed them with an impatient hand, knowing all they would say, and that it was unavailing.

As she looked out of window, she noticed a larkspur opposite, each of its blue blossoms held a bright raindrop (for a brief thunder shower had fallen), and her heart beat again with unexpected gladness; the miracles of a Creator's power and love she did not know so perfectly but that this trifling exhibition of beauty startled her from the leaden mood to which she had succumbed. She prayed then, but silently; her folded hands and upraised eyes alone expressed the blissful revival of hope,—the renewed consciousness that God was with her even in this season of secret despair.

After awhile she felt strong enough to yield to little Mary's repeated petition that she would take her to a distant wood to look for wood strawberries; and with the gladness of the child, and the praise of her own conscience, the afternoon was almost happy.

CHAP. XXVIII.

"Hope is a leaf-joy which may be beaten out to a great extension, like gold."—BACON.

"My heart, that wonted was of yore,
Light as the winds, abroad to soar,
Amongst the buds when beauty springs,
Now only hovers over you,
As doth the bird that's taken new,
And mourns when all her neighbours sing."
Unknown, 1500.

ANOTHER week had passed when a few hasty lines from Miss Hyde told Constance that they were indeed to be off to the Continent the next day; disappointed in their hope of Elinor Lee being allowed to accompany them, but very happy on her account as Major Howarth was coming home, and, by the General's permission, expressly invited to his house; "but my dear Constance, what do you think of those tiresome people the Cartarets choosing to travel on precisely the same route, and telling us with great *empressement*, that they hope we may often meet!"

This was the conclusion of the note in which Basil was not named.

Poor Basil left England in ill-humour; Elinor could not come to soothe him, and a family of bores was on his track,—the woman whom he so much cared for that he was actually on the point of proposing, either did

not care for him in return, when he thought she did, or for some reason or other she was not allowed to show her feelings; perhaps her parents objected, or some better match was on the *tapis*. He was very glad he had not said what he intended, and told her at once how much and how little he could love a second time, — he had very nearly made a fool of himself for the first time, and a miserable man for the second time, but had escaped, and there was an end of the matter. Had he been able to love again as he once loved, an obstacle so accidental could never have misled him; when his whole fate hung upon the lips of another, it was from those lips alone and not from any combination of incidents,— liable to misinterpretation always—that he would have taken the hopeless verdict; but his heart was weary and languid from early passion, and this made him irresolute, distrustful, easily baffled,—now he was away to new scenes, and intense enjoyments, and to a nature like his, this alone would have gone far towards curing him of a second-rate attachment. For Constance, on the other hand, absence was the most likely means of keeping her idealising heart to the object whose real defects and insufficiency she could never test while he was away. Though the "poor bond of habit" is in most cases a very strong aid to attachment, yet with her, presence was almost always disenchanting: now memory and hope were ceaselessly at work in riveting the fetters that bound her.

For several weeks passionate regrets embittered every pleasure, even the least. If the garden looked particularly pretty, or the flower vases, or even her own dress, she felt as if she bore them a grudge for doing so *then*, when it was too late, and not before, at that [illegible] seemed to her to look its best, —

no, not her mother's sensible face: she gazed at it now with the mournful fancy that the Hydes never saw it look so calm and true as now it did; while they were present, the surface current of petty anxieties disturbed and strained her features; but now that she was busily engaged in making a summer frock for Mary, how placid and firm was their expression!

"My dear," said Mrs. Felton, one day as Constance was noting this from behind her book, "do you remember that when Mr. Croft went away, we promised to give the school-children their treat here? His young curate could never manage such a business,—it strikes me that if we are to have your help, we must not delay it. Your uncle put off your coming, I think, to the 12th of August, was it not?"

"Yes, mamma."

"And to day is the 4th,—really there is no time to lose. I will ask your father, and if he thinks well, tell cook to get the cakes made to-morrow, and I dare say you will not mind going to the school to-day with the invitations, and I will write to the Grants and a few others who said they would like to come and help us, for Thursday shall we say?"

"I see no objection, mamma; you could not have finer weather; suppose I go after luncheon and tell the children."

"Do so, my love; we dine early to-day, but you will have time before they leave school; and perhaps you will call on the almshouse people, too, on your way home; it is long since we have seen them; now poor Miss Tennent is ill they want looking after."

Never had Constance felt less inclined for cottage-visiting; her heart was not "at leisure from itself," and as she went along the dusty road, hearing only the melancholy

note of the idle yellowhammer, her thoughts were in Italy, her heart yearning for a sight or a sound far distant from those homely ways. But the garden looked so ready for happiness as she passed through it on her return; every petal of every flower had drunk in a fulness of sunlight, — what deep scarlet in the poppy! — in the lily what perfection of white! She saw her father and mother still lingering about, enjoying the dewy sweetness of the sunset hour, and little Mary laughing at their side; while she, tired and sick of hope, felt too unhappy to take part in their pleasure, and so lay down on the sofa of the hushed and airless drawing-room, where darkness already frowned.

Thursday was fine, and the cakes well baked, and Mrs. Felton in a glow of benevolent animation. Constance and her father had a peculiar disability for being pleased with events which every one else called "gratifying:" if present at a school-inspection, a charity dinner, a workhouse tea-drinking, which drew together a number of pleased spectators, who all called it a "most gratifying sight," ten to one these two odd people felt bored, and very often said they were. From the same peculiarity they did not feel the delight which stimulated Mrs. Felton and Harriet when a grand putting neat, or a Christmas ornamenting party was set on foot; they secretly disliked these gregarious movements, and wished it was not wrong to do so. Constance was obliged to join in them, but her father generally professed pre-engagement. They were both temperamentally incapacitated for catching a prevalent emotion, seeing other people excited about anything was apt to put their interest in it to sleep (an unamiable trait!), and if any one had a design upon their feelings, they were immovable. For this reason, great occasions like

this, of entertaining about a hundred children, were abhorrent to their souls.

Nevertheless, on this day, they took their part of duty with unflinching zeal, and not without some pleasure. Towards the evening Constance stood by a swing under a group of ash trees in her father's grounds, where about fourteen children were gathered, taking turns eagerly in the favourite amusement of swinging. The hum of voices around gave her a temporary release from the feeling that she ought to do something to amuse the children; she listened to it with a dreamy kind of wonder at the joy in which she had so little share; she doubted whether she had ever felt so light-hearted as those loud-tongued little ones appeared with their energetic cries of "Now, Marianne, you go on, will 'ey!" — "Bill, let her alone, do," — "Come on, I say! here Fau-ny, Fau-ny, come on here!"

Then a monotonous singsong accompanied the swinging, and she moved on a few steps, and looked to the open part of the field where the boys were at cricket, and several benevolent visitors standing round to watch the game. One or two rigid frames with all their English ice unmelted, were looking on with intent to be amused, — a few, of happy genial nature, joined in it with exhilarating eagerness, and pleased every one on the field, except a lady, whose querulous face assumed additional distress from apprehension that the cricket-ball might reach her pink crape bonnet.

Constance was getting into a deep discussion with herself as to the impropriety of unhappy-looking people appearing in such a scene, when Mrs. Felton came up and desired her to run indoors, and fetch some bonnets that were now to be given as prizes for the elder girls. Her errand took her through the garden. How lovely

its perfect stillness! its smooth green sward peopled with an orderly throng of August's brightest flowers! She felt as if these pretty creatures were consciously enjoying their own calm life, and though a heavy rose shed its petals as she went by, and one or two of the stately white lilies were beginning to wither, and to look

> "drooping, and white, and wan,
> Like the head and the skin of a dying man," *

yet she felt that their life was more beautiful than hers; and how each shrub talked of Basil!—the Carolina allspice, which he always asked for a piece of, the *Phylarea*, which he generally plucked at when they passed by talking, and the feathery *Spirea ariæfolia* which he used to put aside from his head so gently, as if it had been indeed the fairy lady bending over him which it looked. Constance stood for a few seconds in recollection of many pleasant evenings when the garden had looked as it did now, and thrown that dreamlike glory of low sunbeams on the massive foliage of the chestnut avenue close by; she saw the brightness and felt the blank that such an absence must ever make, unconscious of a still greater separation, for she thought he might now be thinking of those evenings as she did; but the bonnets were waited for, and she could linger there no longer. She was returning quickly to the field when she saw Emma hastening after her from the house.

"If you please, Miss, a gentleman has called, and asked to see you."

"A gentleman! who? what is his name?"

"I couldn't quite hear what he called hisself. I

* Shelley's "Sensitive Plant."

showed him into the drawing-room, and told him you'd be in directly."

"Then you must take these bonnets to Mrs. Felton, Emma," and she went back to the house.

What a wild notion had crossed her brain, and made her cheeks flush and her heart throb violently! People do not always keep to their plans, and he may have cut short his stay in Italy for the sake of a speedy decision. Silly Constance! how could she suppose that a servant would forget the face and name of a person who had but lately spent a week in the house! The folly of such an idea flashed upon her as she opened the drawing-room door, but the excitement it caused had not subsided before even James Podmore, who stood waiting for her, could observe her heightened colour and hurried tones. He greeted her with solemnity, and then told her that his visit was so far accidental, that business had brought him into this part of the country, and as he was passing very near Ashenholt, he could not resist the pleasure of making a digression to Mr. Felton's; he was sorry to call at such an unseasonable hour; could not have taken the liberty of writing to announce his intention of coming; only wished to know how Miss Felton was, and whether he might take home any hope of a visit from her this year.

Constance said all that was civil and obliging, and asked severally after each of the party at Clayfield Lodge, before she proposed going to tell her father and mother of his arrival, "for" she added, "our maid did not catch your name, and they may be as little able to guess it as I was."

Mr. Podmore would go with her if he might; he liked "to see the peasantry indulged with innocent recreations;" he would "venture to suggest,—what perhaps

Miss Felton had not noticed,—that the dew was falling, and her dress was too light to be sufficient protection; Miss Felton ought surely to take more care of herself than to run such risks?"

This, she felt was by no means his concern, but to escape further speechifying, she took an old shawl from the hall table, and flung it round her shoulders with a good-natured smile; he followed her into the garden, with an agreeable opinion of her docility, which cost her still more advice upon the subject of thin shoes: but as soon as they joined her father, and his hearty invitation for James to stay with them at least a day or two, had been accepted, she thought her duty towards him fully discharged, and hastened to employ herself with a troop of children at a little distance off.

CHAP. XXIX.

"J'ai presque envie de demander grâce pour ces minuties qui peuvent paraître fastidieuses; mais qu'est-ce que la vie, sinon un enchaînement de détails plus ou moins importants? Je voudrais en rendre le récit amusant; s'il n'amuse pas, on comprendra mieux encore combien la réalité en était accablante. Ce sont les grands événements qui prennent peu d'espace dans la vie, ils la brisent vîte et nous rendent de même à ces petits détails de longue durée qui font le charme ou le supplice de l'existence."—*Quelques Années de ma Vie, par Madame des Echérolles.*

JAMES PODMORE stayed at Ashenholt three days, and Constance thought no visitor was ever more in the way; but both Mr. and Mrs. Felton were pleased with him. He was a good listener, a slow propounder of judicious sentiments, and a really competent judge of many business matters; qualifications which soon made him their favourite; and as he was good as well as sensible, and prudent as well as rich, Mrs. Felton remarked with pleasure that he paid every attention to Constance, and she did her best to raise her daughter's estimate of his worth by warm and frequent praise. Yet both Constance and little Mary did *not* like him,—kept out of his way as much as they could, and were glad when he was gone; he was too stiff and too formal to please the elder sister, and he made the little one cry by looking heavily into her face when she was brought downstairs. But Constance was to leave home in two days, and Mr. Podmore's visit sunk into due non-importance while Mrs. Felton was busy with preparations. These were

not very extensive; rarely going into the gay world herself, she wore old clothes with undoubting faith in their suitability; and had told Constance that she considered "the Sunday silk" quite as much as she would want for common evening wear at Harndon Hall; this dress had been new, and in fashion some eighteen months back, but the *date* of their best dresses neither Constance nor Mrs. Felton were ever prone to bear in mind, perhaps because the honours given to a suit seldom worn were too great to reconcile with the idea of waning beauty. Notwithstanding, at the last hour, it did strike Constance that a dress so dark and maturely creased would hardly suffice for evening wear beside her cousins', and in anxious haste she sent for some dresses to choose from, and engaged a village sempstress to do her best to finish one before she left; but to no purpose. "The box must be sent after me!" sighed the traveller. "And mamma, only look at these ribbons! I wish I had got more at once, these are so faded!"

"Ask your aunt to take you to a good shop as soon as you can. I should have thought they *would* do, my dear, but at your age, I daresay, I may have been quite as particular."

It was on that sole principle, "what would *do*," not what would be pretty or becoming, that the toilette of Constance was arranged; rather an unfortunate arrangement for one who was going to be with Adelaide Page for some weeks.

All externals are matters of relative importance; at home they have so little significance, from home *so* much. It is curious to remark the influence of *local* modes of feeling upon the mind of a new comer, who, without a word said, is aware of being in a new moral atmosphere, in which accustomed estimates of *what*

matters, need a fresh adjustment,— measurements of what is socially right, an altered standard; in short, that a latitude of opinions altogether new in their proportions is suddenly entered. It was thus with Constance, who had looked forward to her visit with more of pleasure than of shy apprehension, and who found before she had been with her cousins a day, that she was quite out of her element, and heartily wished herself at home again. She had the painful consciousness that she was narrowly looked at; her every word and deed weighed as a sample of character; and when most uneasy she perceived the absolute necessity of looking pleased, and occupying herself with the interests that prevailed around her, rather than with her own.

Mrs. Robert Felton and the girls were very kind in manner, and her uncle extremely gracious, but, by a fatal quickness of penetration, she detected behind that kindness, a fund of cold surprise. When she came down to dinner the first day, she found all the ladies in full evening dress, and her much-esteemed gown felt heavier and more out of date than she could have imagined at Ashenholt, where a pleasing superstition existed that Constance always looked nice: and so she did to *loving* eyes; but away from home, even when she gave her mind to dressing most carefully, there was a visible want of connection and unity of idea in her *tout ensemble:* every material that she wore seemed to take its own undirected course; stiff textures stuck out as far as they could, and limp ones sunk as flatly as they liked upon her unhelpful figure.

Mrs. Robert Felton took in at a glance all her external deficiencies, and was vexed; she had seen how ill the Feltons dressed at home, but on a visit she thought there would be improvement, and her former solicitude

for the welfare of her niece's soul was in temporary abeyance until there was a little reform in dress. It is easy to allow that humility is a Christian grace, and the forsaking of pomps and vanities a duty, and self-denial admirable; we think so until these virtues come to dine at our tables in quaint or shabby dresses. Mrs. Robert Felton was justified in blaming what she saw to be unnecessarily shabby, and Constance was unwise in so little departing from her usual style. She could see this now clearly; at home the soothing influence of habit and affection made her insensible to the worth of personal appearance, and when home prejudices were removed, she was naturally inclined to *exaggerate* its importance.

"Oh, mamma," said Adelaide, going into her mother's morning room a day or two later; "poor Constance wants a box fetched from the railway-station to-day."

"What box? Her luggage came up long ago."

"Yes; but this is a dress she wants."

"I don't know how it is," rejoined her mother, "people of this sort always do want something fetched or bought, as soon as ever they are settled."

"Of course, mamma, of course, it takes some time to find out that they are unfit to be seen in their usual costume, and then they have to make an effort somehow or other to get something more presentable; nothing very surprising in that, that I can see."

"No love, you're right; didn't I hear you talking of going with her to do some shopping? Have the phaeton this afternoon by all means, if she wishes it."

Constance was glad to go, and not sorry that Adelaide changed her mind in favour of a ride, for the eager advice she was sure to give during a shopping campaign would have quickly endangered her own scanty re-

sources, if not her temper. Selina took her sister's place in the carriage, but contributed little to the pleasure of the drive, though she was beginning to thaw towards Constance, and from a well-bred sense of what was due to a visitor, showed her much more attention than she had when at Ashenholt; still her conversation was only a laborious succession of slowly-worded truisms. When they reached the town, she languidly offered her attendance during the shopping, and as languidly leant back in the carriage when Constance assured her she would as soon be alone. She went hastily in and out of the shops, feeling very meagre in bodily, or rather in clothing compass (for it was at a period of petticoat expansion), and was surprised every now and then at her incoherent appearance, when she caught sight of herself in shop looking-glasses; her movements at the best of times unequal and discomposed (from nervousness and chronic bad dressing), were now more than ever divided between rapidity of impulse and retarding cautiousness; but when her business was all done, and she was again in the carriage, swiftly passing through the mild, breezy air, how delightful! how welcome a release from close considerations of £. *s.* *d.* value, and nice examinations of texture and suitableness, to be again able to look far and wide without a thought to perplex, or calculation to bewilder!

In the vagueness of nature her whole being was able to take its rest; her idealising tendencies could there expatiate unchecked; clouds and trees and lanes could be gazed at without any fear of self-committal, if she might but escape hearing the heavy, complacent utterance of self-evident facts also. But it began—just as she was thinking whether whitening willows gave any fair notion of the grey green tint of Italian olive-trees,

Selina steadily turned her eyes upon her, and said with even emphasis, that the country looked cheerful, and the air was very agreeable after the dust and heat of a market-town.

As soon as they got home, Adelaide begged to look at her cousin's purchases; Selina went up to her mother's room, and came back before the small exhibition was over, saying, "Ady, what's mamma reading 'Crook-in-the-Lot' about? and why has she been crying?"

"Oh! only papa. He has been in one of his takings to-day, I am sure I do not know what was the matter, but I heard him speaking dreadfully loud when I came in, and got out of the way at once."

An announcement which filled one of her hearers with apprehension; she had heard her uncle speak with suppressed ill-temper, what must it be when the curb was removed? But when they all met at dinner there was no sign of disturbance in his manner, unless a more exact attention to the ceremonial of suavity betrayed it, which Constance fancied might be the case from the unusual caution of his wife's demeanour, and the silence of Adelaide.

Poor Robert Felton suffered greatly from the wayward violence of his temper, which was all the more daunting from the strong self-reserve through which it would occasionally transpire; for implied displeasure is generally more formidable than copious reproof. He particularly enjoyed conversation, and liked to study the minds of those about him; but from this pleasure, impetuosity of temper, and the *extreme* fastidiousness, on which he plumed himself, cut him off when in the society of people who knew him well. His friends and acquaintance were on their guard while talking to him, —for him every remark was more or less *cooked* by the

discreet, and skilfully directed to some of his weak points by the cunning; and he had keenness enough often to perceive when this was done, and grew still more angry as he noticed it.

Filtered water is flat: conversation purposely fined down and cleared from every exciting element for the benefit of touchy nerves, is still flatter; but at Harndon Hall, it seemed, such precaution was needful.

And really Mrs. Robert Felton was enough to exasperate a calmer temperament than her husband's; she was entirely deficient in tact, and the groundwork of tact, — sense of the ludicrous; and these were deficiencies for which a quoted text — a sigh — a look of mournful disapprobation made no amends, while they increased the temptation of her associates.

CHAP. XXX.

"I mix in life, and labour to seem free,
With common persons pleased and common things,
While every thought and action tends to thee,
And every impulse from thy influence springs."

COLERIDGE.

BEFORE her marriage Mrs. Robert Felton had mixed chiefly in a world of fashionable people, where, perhaps, as in the army, it is difficult to any but the strongest minds to keep up vital piety without the protecting husk of opinions so extreme and distinctive as to put a broad and manifest division between the religious and the worldling. She *was* religious, but from weakness of mind, or want of sound religious education, could achieve no better way of proving herself so than by using a phraseology that at once declared her to be truly pious; but if this was weak and verbose, her good intentions were not the less sincere.

She set herself with affectionate zeal to improve the opportunity of having Constance under her roof. One morning when they were alone together, upstairs, she exhorted her to avoid the snares of self-righteousness, to cease from her own works, to make sure of her election; and when from modesty or from sheer weariness of ineffectual argument, Constance remained silent, she added that she knew her dear niece would be much edified if she would study a few sweet biographies which

she was going to put in her bands. In vain did Constance point out that the works about which she thought it *right* to be anxious, were not those outward performances on which pride or self-pleasing could build, but those works of the spirit, which are spoken of in Scripture as the only test of a living faith; Mrs. Robert Felton could not enter into such nice distinctions, and jumping up as the door-bell rung, went to the glass to smooth her curls, saying, with glib emphasis, "By faith, my love, by faith ye are saved," and was out of the room in another second, leaving Constance to question with herself whether it was not almost dishonest to go through the forms of serious discussion with such a person, — and to wonder what the works were on which her aunt animadverted; whether she meant her habit of reading the Psalms and Lessons for the day, or a few baby clothes she was making for a poor woman at home. Involuntarily she found herself making comparisons between her own character and that of her two cousins. She had been astonished since she came here at the way in which Selina and Adelaide jarred and bickered with one another; and with them there seemed to be a short and sudden leap from a very fluent quoting of texts — by way of admonition — to the most unveiled recrimination, — personal pique breaking out undisguised.

This surprised her the more, because she and Harriet, having been brought up in very strict regard to moral principles, never indulged their tempers (often roused), without using, even in childhood, a respectable pretext of virtuous indignation. Whenever *they* fell out, Constance was "ashamed to see Harriet act so wrongly," and Harriet "really wondered that Constance could be so foolish, — so unreasonable." But here were sisters

actually accusing each other of falsehood and petty malice and revenge on the least provocation. Their mother bewailed it, but unhappily she knew too little of human nature to see the damage she had done and was still doing by her indiscriminate and exclusive application of only one portion of Christian truth.

The consequences of this were lamentable; always used to appeals for *emotional* religion, the young people thought little of its restrictive obligations, and as they were seldom referred to Conscience as a lawgiver, they had acquired little more than second-hand notions of duty, and knew nothing of the unflinching precision of conduct, which is the aim of those who look for its mandates within, not waiting till they reach them from without. Thus, they were still childish in soul, and puzzled by such religion as they saw actuating Constance,—her external freedom and habitual self-command was to Adelaide a startling phenomenon.

"Shall I fetch you my new French novel, Constance?" she said one day, soon after her mother and sister had set off to a fancy bazaar for some local charity, that was being held a few miles from the Hall, to which Constance had declined going, because she did not like to go, and Adelaide because she was sure it would make her head ache. "Shall I get you the novel?"

"Did not aunt Robert say it was written very indelicately here and there?"

"Yes; but she always fancies mischief; and I *know* it is delightfully entertaining,—she will never know you read it."

"Thank you," replied Constance, "but *I* should know, and that is quite enough;" and then with a little hesitation she added, "it seems to me disgraceful to do things by the sly that you dare not have known."

"Well, well, I daresay it is, only one learns not to think so at school; pray, dear, do not look so solemn, I meant no harm — there! I must be pardoned with a kiss; let us have a happy day—what shall we do?"

"It is beautiful out of doors, shall we sit out?"

"Let us; but I shall be busy a little while first."

Adelaide's business was going into her mother's room and trying on a new bonnet that had lately come from Paris. She might have asked leave to do this openly, but preferred from the shyness of a weak nature to do it without her mother's knowledge. Her conscience was never very much burdened with the little misdeeds she transacted by herself: it was hardly likely that it should be; for every trifling fault in childhood had been the subject of so much public wailing and investigation, —so many searching questions before, and profusely penitent prayers after, every small confession, that she was accustomed to feel as if her soul was no concern of hers; her mother tracked it into every corner, there was no room left for *self*-condemnation.

She and Constance got on very well so long as their mutual complacency was guarded by the cautious politeness of slight acquaintance; the vivacity and elegance of the one, and the earnestness and moral courage of the other made them mutually attractive; but when it came to living together for a fortnight, Constance, at least, felt their natural discordancy most painfully. It was easy at night by moonlight, or under the golden blink of stars infinitely distant, to resolve to be as tender with her as ever, but in broad daylight, when she said and did all sorts of foolish things, it was quite different; and she had not pride enough, or weight of character enough, to subdue the impatience of Constance by natural repression, so that the most trifling folly would sometimes provoke an outburst of pettish surprise.

And yet Adelaide's nature had a soft and leaning tendency which would have made her very winning and tenderly beloved, had it not been for a strange mixture of pomposity and assumption that made her occasionally ridiculous. Probably, the same sense of feebleness caused both the extreme docility of some moods, and the ungraceful self-assertion of others; but few people had penetration enough to bring the two into any kind of accord, and just the person who most yearned for a friend on whom she might lean, had the unfortunate art of repelling those to whom she advanced, and showing an awkward kind of *hauteur* just when she would gladly have humbled herself in order to earn love.

Constance was down-hearted on the day of the bazaar; it was *so* long since she had heard the name of Basil, so very long since she lost sight of his face in the woody tangle, as he turned off with those cruel Miss Thickleys, and now where was he? and what was he thinking about? Not about her; but that was the last answer that she was able to imagine. Still her cherished visions began to grow dim. She had told herself six or seven times in the course of that morning, that she had many more blessings than she could ever deserve, which was with her a sure sign of wanting *some*, in no slight degree of dejection: it was not

> "The feeling that upbraids the heart
> With happiness beyond desert," *

but the *thought* which tried vainly to awaken the *feeling*.

When Adelaide left her, she went to her room also, determined to fight down her troubled feelings, and gather a little cheerfulness from sacred words: she succeeded, and made many firm resolves to be indulgent

* Coleridge.

and good to Adelaide, to bear gently with her weaknesses, and lead her on in any way where she had power to help. Presently she came down again, and found her cousin sitting in the garden, idly yawning over a number of Dickens's last work. The sight of this when Constance knew that Adelaide's history-reading had been for weeks at a stand-still, and that her basket was full of untouched work, (and on both points she had an hour before professed lively intentions of reform, promising her mother to be very diligent in her absence), was a little provoking at half-past eleven, A.M.; but in her valour against temptation, Constance made no remark, and sitting down on the bench beside her, only relieved her mind by the rapidity of her needle; unluckily there was in her whole demeanour such a stern look of resistance and self-command, that poor Adelaide, attributing it to the irregularities of her own habits, felt too much despised to care to enter into conversation, and therefore went on with her story,— its pages being just then full of gay interest.

The sternness of Constance was really directed against those faults in *herself* that Adelaide roused up, but how was the culprit to guess this? A sigh from her companion at the end of half-an-hour's silence,— a forced "how hot it is!"—a lazy little grunt of timid assent from the reader, and a retreat into the house for some profitable book, as hard to understand as she thought her cousin's frivolous, proved that the morning's scheme had been rather a failure. And this was but a sample of the way in which she lost what might have been available ground; nevertheless Adelaide attached herself to the stronger nature, and paid it the burdensome compliment of frequent applications for advice—advice seldom heard, because she talked too much to listen, and when heard,

never followed. It was in a *tête-à-tête* that she respected her cousin's talent,—in society, she thought her a peculiar kind of goose.

One day, an invalid neighbour had been making a long and complaining visit, only the girls stayed to hear for the fiftieth time, how lonely, mournful, and neglected poor Lady Maunby found herself. Mrs. Robert Felton begged to be excused, as she had an engagement that afternoon. Adelaide soon joined her mother upstairs, sitting down with a gasp of weariness. "Mamma, I really *could* not stay downstairs any longer with Constance and that exhausting old lady, — there she sits by her, nodding and whispering all her complaints, ever and anon imploring Constance to come and see her *often*, for a *long* day; and she like a goose looks so intently pitiful, and utters an '*I will*,' that is fervent enough for the marriage service,—as if old Lady Maunby cared a straw whether she did or no; what nonsense it is to take everybody so literally."

At that moment Constance entered, for the visitor was gone.

"I was saying, Constance, what folly it is to believe all Lady Maunby tells you about her miseries, and want of a companion; and what a pity you agreed to go and be bored at her dull house; you know she never cares for visitors really."

"If she does not, she should not ask them. People must take the consequences of insincerity." So Constance answered, but she thought, "I ought not to be so easily taken in by manner: people must take the consequences of ignorance, and the want of worldly wisdom."

CHAP. XXXI.

"Something there is more needful than expense,
And something previous ev'n to taste,—'tis sense:
Good sense, which only is the gift of Heaven,
And though no science, fairly worth the seven."—POPE.

SUDDENLY to find yourself where all your best parts are lost, and all your weakest exposed, is a common fate, though that of a "delighted" guest. At Harndon Hall Constance was thoroughly uneasy from morning till night; she blamed herself very much for it—she was puzzled to understand why she felt so uncomfortable, and she wondered why she suffered more from depression in that house than she had even in the dullest days with the Podmores: she thought it was, perhaps, because of contrast to the early part of the summer, or because no one here knew the Hydes, or cared to hear about them, even when she gave herself the pleasure of mentioning them as friends.

There were other reasons less romantic, of which she could hardly take full cognisance. At Clayfield Lodge she was admired, and altogether superior to her associates in the advantages most dear to woman,—in grace, and elegance, and good looks. Here it was just the reverse, beside Selina and Adelaide she felt herself rather awkward; and her aunt would have made almost any other woman look clumsy: in the knowledge *they* most prized she was deficient, and they only

knew enough of her intellectual tastes to think them a great pity, as being unsuitable for a woman.

Besides, her uncle disliked her: for the first time in her life, she found herself in an atmosphere that contained the subtle poison of antipathy. She had no proof of his dislike that would have enabled her to attribute their occasional misunderstandings to *his* state of mind; and so the burden of shame and regret fell entirely upon her own conscience, and as she always felt disturbed in his presence, and often perceived covert irritation in his manner when he spoke to her, she supposed it was *her* fault for being so provokingly *gauche*,—so unlike her cousins. In this she was mistaken; many of the little passages between them which put her out of countenance were caused by his rudeness, which verbal courtesy alone could save from the charge of ill-manners; for example, one day when she was speaking to him of an old family friend, Dr. ——, who was now a distinguished writer on scientific subjects, her uncle took some time in pretending to recall whom she meant, — and on her saying, "Do you ever see him now when you are in London?" he answered with smoothest tones, "Dr. ——? Yes, I meet him occasionally at dinner-parties: is there anything very particular in his abilities?"

He and the world knew that there was, but it suited his temper to make Constance feel how trifling *her* great men seemed to him; and she, always pre-occupied with self-accusation, and wishing that she was not given to speak so pompously, did not notice the real incivility of her uncle's intended disparagement. Yet the foible for which she condemned herself was not wholly imaginary. It is a curious truth, that the most diffident people, when speaking of things they know,

often give out their little experiences with an important air and undue emphasis, seldom found in the communications of well-bred confident egotism: perhaps it is that, when the timid make up their minds to mention what is to them personally interesting, it is from a belief that the fact or observation is of a magnitude that must command attention, and so convinced, they bear heavily upon it, as a plank that for a while holds them up in the floods of shame and self-contempt, with which they are so frequently overwhelmed.

It was thus with Constance, and besides, all her little shy fancies so controlled the *élan* of her nature, that when she spoke there was an obvious degree of preparation in her remarks,—an insipid avoidance of controvertible opinions, which sometimes made her hearers think her curiously tiresome. In many ways her uncle contrived to make her feel what a vapid ingredient of society he found her, often exhibiting that insolent sort of deafness when she spoke, which is designed to show that nothing is anticipated worth listening to, and that only reiterations will enforce attention.

Constance was not much more at ease with her aunt; she read so many hymns to her which she could not feel, lent her so many devout little books for which she had no appetite, and seemed to expect from her so many more religious utterances than she could with any sincerity volunteer, that the poor girl began to think her soul in a perilous state of unbelief and impiety,—and thus the one comfort of her dejected moods, that had never failed her before, was diminished; and human expectations came as a thick cloud between her soul and its God.

She need not have taken her disinclination for books of much-exclaiming piety as a symptom of any decay

in her own; their raw and weak divinity could only dull her mind; and as they were mainly intended to bring into strong contrast the depravity of worldly ways, and the triumphant and unalterable sanctity of those who once forsake them, their counsels did not bear at all upon the real temptations of her heart: a rough eloquence which can only be applied to extreme cases, leaves untouched the conscience that is beset with disguised and subtle snares. One page of George Herbert or Butler, of Jeremy Taylor's or Isaac Taylor's writings, would have been a spiritual feast, after trying to swallow all this devotional chaff.

But if she was out of heart about her soul's welfare, in most respects she was conscious that her patience was increasing: Adelaide kept it in daily exercise. When you say that any one is unconscientious about little matters, it may be assumed that the conduct of such a person is extremely inconsistent and vexatious; especially must it be so to companions of a scrupulous nature.

Constance, used to the fullest liberty in the disposal of her time, had been awed by the weight of that liberty into a careful use of every hour; Adelaide, goaded from day to day by the excessive application of religious stimulus, had left her unsensitive conscience in the keeping of her elders, and so snatched unscrupulously at every enjoyment the passing moment offered. Whatever Constance or Selina might be doing, if Adelaide was in a humour for talking, talk she would, and often such nonsense! Such a sad mixture of her own sentiments and those she faintly re-echoed from her mother; thus one morning she broke in upon her cousin's Bible-reading upstairs merely to report that she was wishing to have a nicer evening dress, but her quarterly

allowance was at an end already, and it was not *quite* certain whether a silk or muslin would suit her best, and besides, it was said in the Bible, "Neither for your raiment what ye shall put on," — and certainly the vanities of this world were to be renounced, and on *that* ground alone she would content herself with what she had, and tell Selina she was very wrong because *she* could not, but meant to have a new dress at once. It would have been perfectly vain for Constance to waste words in showing Adelaide that she was trying to cheat herself, and that it was dishonest to call a wish that extravagance and indecision hindered her from actuating, a temptation resisted on conscientious grounds; and besides, Constance thought, she only says aloud what passes secretly in many wiser minds; half-motives rule the world much more than those which are usually assigned as causes of actions.

There was no need and no time to comment on Adelaide's self-deception, for she quickly rambled off upon some fresh topic equally fruitless. One person in a household who idly dissipates the day, robs every one else in it of more or less time: while she lounged and chattered on so remorselessly, Constance tried by the forced blandness of smiles to make amends for want of close attention to such dull prate, — by degrees even the power to command smiles was exhausted, and she said, "Really, dear Adelaide, we had better get something to do; do you see the clock?"

"Oh, yes, Constance, as well as you; but what can I do better than get your advice while you are here? You are so wonderfully prudent and discreet."

"My advice?"

"Yes, to be sure: haven't I been waiting here just to know whether you advise me to accept this invitation to

Bellinger Castle? Mamma will preach over me for hours if I do, and papa be terribly angry if I don't, — then, I must let you into a secret: I shall meet some one there who likes me very much, and whom *I* like rather, too — it's very hard the life I lead between mamma's texts, and papa's thunders!"

After the little acknowledgment of the worth of her advice, Constance felt less severe about the loss of time, and gave Adelaide the best counsels she could, suggesting that she might lay before her mother the real difficulty of the case, the fear of displeasing her father, who, as she said, wished her to go, — and with the advice came earnest warnings against anything like prevarication; but as neither advice nor monition was really desired, Adelaide was soon "obliged to go." All she cared for was sympathy, and the sympathy of Constance was not always sweet; it was too piercing: possibly it awakened a dim notion that she who so clearly discerned the sting of sorrow, or the windings of temptation, would be as quick to discern and condemn faults.

It may have been this peculiarity of insight that annoyed her uncle. He was used to something like flattery from every one who was habituated to the influence of his temper; flattery is the mental cotton-wool that people naturally protect themselves with, when brought into collision with a violent and imperious man; but Constance could not flatter, inward perceptions always predominating in her external deportment.

If Mr. Robert Felton made a joke, however small, his family welcomed it with excessive mirth; and it was not only feigned pleasure, for this proof of his being in a good humour relieved them of present fear, and the applause they offered generally helped to prolong

peace; but the laugh of Constance, if she could laugh at all, was faint, for it pained her to see people laugh from policy. And then so much admiration was constantly expected! She had time after time responded to her uncle's leading question of, "How do you like my shrubberies?" by sincere and hearty praise; but when at every turn she became aware that a compliment or admiring ejaculation was expected, she tried in vain to meet the demand with mild expressions of pleasure, for sometimes a secret yawn would occupy her mouth before she could frame a sentence; and her uncle resented the omission. All this was irksome to her nature in the highest degree; and many a morning she thought with a sigh, as she awoke, "Another day in which I must show sustained enjoyment!"

Perhaps she did not consider how much joy after her own taste was intensified by this process of social wearying: the broad moon peering over the hill-top, and the crisp ears of corn waving against its disk, as they drove under the long ledges of down country, could not have thrilled her with so deep a rapture, if she had not been tied up all the day to pointless conversation, and urged by innate politeness to appear interested in the futile remarks of those whose strongest powers had been immolated to etiquette and a subservience to ill-temper. It is true that she had envied the inartificial life of some sleepy ducks which they passed, up to their heads in the warm straw of a sheltered farmyard — feeling herself at the moment an exile from nature; but oh! when she could turn from so-called society to her own thoughts (always talking of Basil), and give to the green fields about her a heartfelt smile, she felt the fulness of joy to which her hidden birthright

entitled her — the serene power of harmonising with the world as God made it.

The thistle, the mallow, and the fox-glove, in "the plain leafy fact of it,"* were enchanters, who, touching her inmost heart, broke all its fetters, and left her a free spirit, glad and thankful before its Maker, though dumb and cold to man.

* Keats.

CHAP. XXXII.

"If the flames begin to break forth in censoriousness, reproaches, and hard speeches, be as speedy and busie in quenching it as if it were fire in the thatch of your house."—R. BAXTER.

THE day for Constance to return home drew near; she had been happier ever since it was definitely fixed; and as it was decided that as soon as she left, Adelaide should pay her visit to Bellinger Castle, she also was in high spirits, and very affectionate to everybody in consequence. She told her cousin in strict confidence that she hoped to coax her father to invite "a certain person" to join the party that were to assemble at his house in September for shooting; and the heart of Constance began to warm both towards her and Selina: cordial expressions escaped her lips almost unconsciously,—something in the same way that a letter written in ill-humour, is often seasoned at the end with strong and broad splashes of affectionate kindness; when we feel that the communication is about to close for at least a few weeks, and uncertainty as to the time of its renewal beguiles a soft heart into tenderness which presence would infallibly endanger. It is a case of

"unwonted love,
And such forgiveness as we bring to those
Who can offend no more"—

at least for a while. But one of her last days at Harndon Hall Constance felt the longest,—a very wet day, when

no one came in or went out, and nothing happened to stir the social atmosphere. She had been indulging herself after luncheon in a calm reverie at her bed-room window; thinking with delight that in three days she should be at home;—counting the weeks till the Hydes would come back to England;—wondering how soon Basil would find his way to Ashenholt, when suddenly conscience rebuked the unsociableness of staying so long by herself. "There's uncle Robert sneezing savagely downstairs!" she said to herself; "what a noise he contrives to make about it! I wonder whether La Bruyère was right in making the rich man cough and blow his nose so boisterously, and the poor man do it just as gently as he can. Uncle Robert must be prodigiously rich at that rate!"

She went down, and unluckily found him ready to dispute.

"What's your uncle Graham about now down in Wales? do you know?" he said to her.

"He has not spoken much of his occupations, uncle, in the last few letters we have had."

"Ay, ay! as usual—still meditating—pondering what he *shall* do, *some* day: that man will spend his whole life in determining how he shall live, and when it is time to die, he will find out that he has scarcely lived, only vegetated."

"The poor people in his neighbourhood do not think so!" cried Constance, with angry emphasis.

"Indeed! I wish I could share their opinion," replied her uncle, with stinging indifference in his tone; "perhaps I may be enlightened as to the nature of his benefactions, for I should imagine a man without a profession, and so small an income as his, had not much to dispose of."

"People who only care for *money* might say so."

"I am still uninformed as to the style of the charities to which you referred."

"Every sort of service that a good and wise man can render to those within reach of his kindness! You have never been to his house, uncle, and cannot guess what he is *there*, but papa, who went ——"

"Pretty well, I believe; but I confess these nameless services appear to me a poor substitute for regular employment. Of course I have no right to find fault,—he is some years older than I,—but one may be pardoned for a little surprise and chagrin when, after many years' absence from this country, you find a brother, who was always reputed the genius of the family—who when you left was thinking of taking orders some day, but studying medicine meanwhile—doing absolutely nothing on your return,—nothing but meditate in a bit of a cottage, and comfort old women when they are rheumatic!"

"You are unjust to him, uncle; you know he writes."

"Writes! and what? flimsy pamphlets, just clever enough to show how much he *might* have done with his brains if he had overcome his sloth; for I declare I think it was *that* more than the profound scruples he alleged that kept him from being ordained."

The eyes of Constance flashed with indignation as she replied, "I wish you would not say such things to me; I love him very much, and honour him with my whole heart,—*pray* say no more about him."

"Oh, by all means—I had no idea I was on such tender ground; but this I will say, that more people are ruined in these times by what they call a faithful adherence to their own truth, than by all the youthful follies that were in fashion in the days of our

ancestors; we must wait for our true *vocation* now-a-days,—wait, and do no violence to our spiritual nature, forsooth! stuff and nonsense! It is wilfulness and self-pleasing we attend to, and yielding to these refuse all drudgery and hard work."

Constance hardly heard what he said; she was too angry, and fully occupied in trying to subdue her anger: she only showed that she felt his sarcasms, by answering with a voice rather thicker than usual, but her heart throbbed as if it would make itself heard in spite of self-control. The opinions on which her uncle so severely animadverted had long been endeared to her, though they had cost some painful moments already in conversation with her stepmother, who, with a strong turn for *practical* success, very nearly agreed with Mr. Robert Felton in her estimate of his recluse brother: she thought it a sad pity that he should indulge in such eccentricity as the enjoyment of a peaceful and independent life; "he ought to have got on in the world," she said—ignorant of how high a station he had reached in the only world he cared for. But these sentiments were seldom allowed to transpire, because her husband, though very dissimilar in taste, loved and respected him more than any man on earth, and only regretted that his brother Graham was so much attached to his distant home that he could rarely be induced to leave it, even for a short visit to him.

If it had not been for this uncle Graham, Constance might have learned to think some of her dearest speculations a form of diseased intellect—so utterly unprized, nay unknown, were they among those with whom she lived; but if she even thought of him in the driest intellectual deserts, her soul took courage, and was refreshed by remembering the free atmosphere that surrounded

his mental life: to her it seemed an element as boundless as the sea which expands the shrivelled sea-weeds when it sweeps them from barren rocks into its ever-moving deep.

Happily this same remembrance helped her now to regain equanimity; she repeated to herself all she had heard him say about the duty of a placid reception of wrongs, and to prove her forgiveness began to speak again to her uncle Robert: his restless walk up and down the room and chafed manner had silenced every one else.

"Mr. Langhorne's carriage drove by in the rain just now, with the interesting Pole on the box."

"What *had* Wrangham to do with paying toll to-day? Where was he?" replied her uncle.

"I said *Mr. Langhorne's* carriage."

"Oh, I beg your pardon,—and why did it not pay toll?"

Constance repeated her remark as syllabically as pettishness and nervous timidity would allow, and then, finding her public-spirited attempts so unsuccessful, she left the room to gain a refuge for her temper in the library.

"I wish Constance would not speak in that soft whispery way," said her uncle, as the door closed; "it sounds so affected. Selina, how much longer are you going to torment me with the click of those knitting pins? Do pray take off that huge bracelet if you must knit!" Selina put the knitting away with dogged alacrity.

"Where's Constance gone?" asked Adelaide, looking up from her book.

"To read, I suppose. Mamma asked her to finish those sermons before she went."

"Oh," said their father, "she would not wait for that. Constance belongs to a society for promoting dulness, and it's one of its most stringent rules to read so many chapters in some stupid book every day, by way of taking in supplies for daily dogmatizing."

But she soon came back, and asked him if he was inclined to play a game of backgammon with her, so good-humouredly, that he could neither refuse nor find anything more to carp at in her conversation during the rest of the afternoon.

The following day had been allotted to a distant expedition for a morning concert and afternoon shopping, but the post brought Constance news of the sudden death of Mr. Podmore: he had fallen down at prayer time one evening, and after a few minutes had ceased to breathe; he was suddenly called away, but only those whom he left behind were to be pitied. Constance was much shocked, and her grief was sincere, not *only* for his poor children and Mrs. Podmore — he was *the* one of the whole family to whom she had at all attached herself. For some time after the letters came in, she felt as sudden a revolution of mind, as complete an undervaluing of all *known* things, and as entire an absorption in thoughts of the unknown, as sometimes we feel at night when wakened from dreams that have roused in the soul its dormant powers of terror, — its trembling conviction that death and judgment, and "the wrath to come," are certainties drawing very near. The dream is forgotten, and the effect wrought on the mind by hearing of a sudden death gradually fades away; but it had not begun to lessen when Adelaide came up to her, and said she supposed she would not mind going with them all the same; and when Constance begged to be excused, for she would much rather stay at home, her cousin rudely shrugged her shoulders, and said *she* saw no need

for that; he was no relation; it was very shocking, of course, that he was dead, and so suddenly—terrible for his relations, and all that,—still, if Constance would not go, she must; they *must* get their bonnets—should she get any white gloves for her at their nice glove-shop?

It was a comfort to Constance when they drove off, and left her in peace to write to Mrs. Podmore, and think of what was going on at Clayfield Lodge. Her uncle being gone to a distant meeting, for the day, rendered the change of plan possible, for she had no fear of his temper to influence her decision. She had made an effort of independence in thus refusing to join the party for the concert, and she knew that her aunt and cousins were put out with her for doing so; being therefore in rather a high-strung state of feeling during their absence, she found it difficult, after her letters were written, and her sad thoughts thought out, to occupy herself with books as usual; and as the time for their return approached, she fancied the home-comers full of hard thoughts of her conduct,—or, at least, curious to know if her agitation and trouble had worn off. They were nothing of the sort; it chanced that they never thought of Constance, her doings, motives or mood, until they met her in the drawing-room before dinner, and then all they thought of was that she *must* see the bonnet Adelaide had chosen,—laugh at Selina for buying half a dozen pairs of cheap gloves that split on being tried on, instead of three that could be worn; and listen to Mrs. Robert Felton's emphasised account of the horses shying near the turnpike. The guarded dignity of the listener was quite thrown away upon them, all talking too fast to heed anything but their own recitals, and she was compelled to be gay with them, from the sheer pressure of nonchalant egotism.

The next day she was on her way home.

CHAP. XXXIII.

"No deviating joy is found,
But dulness runs its daily round."—W. F.

"Haply this life is best,
If quiet life be best; sweeter to you
That have a sharper known; well corresponding
With your stiff age; but, unto us, it is
A cell of ignorance."—CYMBELINE.

COMING home was such a great event to Constance that it seemed almost unnatural that, in so short a time as an hour or two after her return, the old house should have subsided into its wonted quietude; already her father and mother had lapsed into their usual after-dinner silence, and Mary was gone to bed, only half an hour later than she generally did. But how delightful silence was in the usual nooks, among the faded furniture of their still drawing-room; how pleasant each familiar sound, even the distant pumping in the yard, and the yelp of the kenneled dog! For during the three weeks that had passed since she last heard those home noises, she had lived through so much mental discomfort that the time seemed twice as long in retrospect.

Now she could be happy again, but not altogether; in the course of that same evening she was aware that home anxieties pressed more heavily than they did a few weeks ago. At first she thought it might be only

a fancy of her own, a natural result of many little contrasts in the establishment of people who were obliged to save, and of those who chiefly considered the pleasantest ways of spending. She had felt a momentary surprise at her mother's eagerly dissuasive tone when Mr. Felton proposed having the fire lighted; and again she blamed herself for being disconcerted, even for an instant, by hearing Emma told not to cut such a quantity of bread and butter for tea another day: it was petty economy, certainly; and at Harndon Hall such infinitesimals of prudence would have been inconceivable; but her father was a poor man, and of course the extravagance of servants ought to be checked, even in trifles. She supposed it was equally necessary for her mother to wear the exhausted-looking barege dress that hung limp and pale upon her, still ——

"Well, my love," said Mrs. Felton kindly, while resuming her needlework after tea, "you must have a great deal to tell me about; you know you come from the gay world, and you will find me a willing listener, for I have scarcely seen a creature beyond the village people since you went,—no one to give us the least change of ideas."

"Indeed, mamma, there was but little gaiety at uncle Robert's—didn't I tell you that they were in mourning for a brother of my aunt's? So, luckily for me, there were no dinner parties, and not much visiting either, only callers now and then."

"Still you *have* seen how people are dressing themselves now, and I have been waiting till you came back, hoping you could tell me how I had better have my poplin made up when it is turned. Miss Tennent has just had her silk dyed, the brown one I mean, and made with trimmings up the front."

The mental vision of these venerable dresses, coming out with new garniture, and the thought of all the deliberations that would precede their sombre reappearance, affected Constance gloomily, but she would have thrown all the light she could upon eligible fashions, had not her father roused himself just then with the abrupt exclamation: "You must learn to do without silk dresses for a long time now!"

"Oh yes, dear papa, we don't want them."

"I trust you will not have to want anything more necessary either; but I confess affairs are not in a very prosperous condition just now. Waitman has decamped, —left the country; and with him goes every chance of my five years' rent being paid. Robert told me he was a scamp, and I more than suspected it myself; only, with his sickly wife and family, I really had not the heart to proceed against him, and now it's too late."

Constance heard with the silence of deep concern, and Mr. Felton continued, after a moment's pause: "Did your mother tell you that we have lost our best cow?"

"What! that fine Alderney you gave so much for last year?"

"Yes, there is some epidemic among the cattle now; I shall probably lose more before we've done with it."

Mrs. Felton stitched on with nervous energy, and all three remained silent, for her husband again closed his eyes wearily, as if disinclined for talking. Constance was dismayed by the train of thoughts thus suggested, but she had long ago reached the age when disturbances of spirits or of temper in those around her were inevitably felt: she was no longer able to escape from attention to her father's gravity and her mother's sighs; nor were these now regarded as impenetrable mysteries, for

she had sometimes found out what was the matter by instinct, and had been surprised at her own success in soothing annoyance; childish selfishness and childish indifference were at an end, and she now took the infection of care with a woman's quickness of sympathy.

That evening it came into her mind for the first time that if she married a rich man, home difficulties would be lessened; and by chance coincidence, while she mused upon this new combination of ideas, Mrs. Felton looked up and asked her, *sotto voce*, if she could at all guess what poor Mr. Podmore had left his eldest son, and whether she had any notion of how the girls would be provided for; and though Constance was quite unable to form any guess about the will, the question served to divert Mr. Felton's thoughts from his own personal anxiety.

In spite of care, and in spite of the secret daily disappointment of getting no news of the Hydes, the first few days that followed were happy ones to Constance; dull enough, but free from fear and social gyves: the miserable constriction of heart from which she had been suffering for so many days was at an end; at home she never felt her voice altered to unnaturally measured tones, and her smile joyless from a strong-willed effort to look pleased; she could speak as the thought struck her, and had not so long to doubt whether her remark was *worth* making as to lose the opportunity of making it.

To be out of our natural element implies a degree of positive wretchedness; it is to gasp in spirit for the air we can breathe in freely, and for light and calm not confused by sights and sounds utterly foreign to our usual experience: but, when once restored to our proper atmosphere, we have again time to feel the dis-

temperatures that try us even there. And now Miss Tennent's narratives were again wearisome; and Constance began once more to wish that her mother would not make such a *great* point of little things, and ask her ignorant opinion so often upon domestic matters of seeming unimportance; for while her finger was holding open Schiller's poem "Die Ideale," it seemed *so* needless to be consulted as to whether a new broom should be bought; and she listened to the *pros* and *cons* of expediency with some impatience all the time that Mrs. Felton was closely examining the carpet for signs of decay, and then bewailing them when found. As to carpets and brooms and other household goods, Constance treated them in her imagination with as much levity as if they were so many natural products that could be gathered on the wayside every day; for the poor girl knew as yet little of *need* beyond such trifling wants as her allowance failed to cover.

With all this vivacity of mind at home about tangible objects, she found next to none in subjects that were congenial to her own taste, and again it began to seem to her as if all taste *must* be stifled by the solid dulness of her life: sometimes she *almost* wished herself back at Harndon Hall—public news was talked of there; but here, when her father was depressed and anxious, questions of general interest were seldom mooted; he read a good deal too—the newspapers always, but rarely spoke of what he read, as his wife commonly met any notice of public affairs with an immediate turning off to personal concerns; and by thus checking his very slight inclination to speak on any but home interests, she unconsciously silenced him altogether.

In many of England's most peaceful homes this state of things is too common and painless to be noticed, but

it is often *very* oppressive to the young, who have not known enough of life to believe how little *their* ideas of happiness are likely ever to be realised: their elders know it; *they* sit down in quiet homes, weary, it may be, with a vain struggle for the prizes this world offers; and,— conversing much with memory,— the delusiveness of hope and the emptiness of possession are assured facts to them: to the young and ardent they are mere words; — and if they cannot find adequate stimulus in the sedate circle around them, imagination is called in, to animate with dreams what otherwise appears dead asleep.

Constance now lived in such unbroken companionship with her dreams that they gained ground upon reason every day. Yet she strove against their influence, so far that she did all she could to occupy herself with present things, and laboured, often fruitlessly, to amuse her parents, and beguile them of those anxious thoughts which in hopeful moments she believed it might some day be her happy lot to remove.

Before the end of September it was her turn to be silent, and to need their utmost care: intermittent fever laid her low. For some time she could not leave the house; and when again she did, it was only to have an hour or two of warm stillness in a garden-couch, drawn under the shade of an old pear-tree (for it was hot weather then)— the gravel-walk and the nearest shrubs and plants on each side of it forming her prospect,— a few curious robins her company — a loud cawing rook, flapping across the bit of sky she gazed at, the only startling incident of her silent afternoons. They were happy afternoons to her; the external peace around seemed to confirm delightful thoughts within, and though Miss Hyde had written from Florence, and sent

no special message from Basil to her, yet she felt convinced that Miss Hyde knew of his affection towards her, from the manner in which he was repeatedly mentioned throughout the long kind letter.

It was now and then a troubling remembrance that many months might pass before they met, and that he had said nothing definite. Oh! that unhappy *contretemps* of the pic-nic day! — yet if his love then was true, it would last,— hers had, and surely his would not be worth a sigh if absence could kill it; — and then with a sigh the poor child lifted the weight of vague fears off her mind, and turned in grateful confidence to the Father in whose gracious care she left all her future; thanking Him with tears, that He had knit together such hearts as hers and Basil's.

Looking up, as she did so, to the long curving branches that received the full glow of October sunshine, and only suffered a beam to cross her figure here and there, she observed several flame-coloured leaves flicker off them and fall noiselessly to the ground: with listless eyes watching their red and gold tints, she was led to think of decay in them, of death in mortal man. Ah! true, Basil or she might die, might be taken from each other; but even then, was she not ready to resign *all* to the will of God? Yes: she could endure the thought of this woe, and for this she was prepared; but there are other changes, which she did not then anticipate, that prove faith no less severely.

CHAP. XXXIV.

"Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep—
He hath awaken'd from the dream of life.
. . . . . .
He has outsoar'd the shadow of our night;
Envy and calumny, and hate and pain,
And that unrest, which men miscall delight,
Can touch him not, and torture not again."—SHELLEY.

ON hearing of the recent illness of Constance, Mrs. Podmore renewed her entreaties that she would visit them again this autumn. For some weeks she had kept up a running fire of invitations, pleading that it would be an act of charity to join their melancholy circle,—that such an amiable guest would do them all good;—"and now," she wrote, "that change of air is probably desirable for your own health, I have less scruple in asking you to befriend us with your enlivening society."

Constance had a reason for not wishing to go, which she could not bring forward even to herself, so obscure and undemonstrable were its grounds; and when the plan was under discussion, she only repeated with great eagerness that she was sure Clayfield Lodge could never do her any good, and that she did not quite see of what use she could be to the poor Podmores; adding, with the *rallentando* of compunction, that she did not wish to be selfish about it. Nothing was decided that morning: Mrs. Felton was in haste to leave the breakfast-

table for the "high emprise" to which she had devoted her notable energies,—the cutting out and making at home of a new sofa-cover. Large scissors and a crackling roll of chintz had preceded her into the drawing-room, and she summoned Constance to help in measuring, with the countenance of one who enters upon a serious responsibility. It was a cold bustling day, both indoors and out, for the windows being still open in summer fashion, filled the passages with gusty draughts, and made all the doors shut with a petulant slap; the sun was bright now and then, but frequent splashes of cold rain made it impossible to walk far with any prudence,— one of those ugly days when people seem fated to choose their most disagreeable employments, and guests the least welcome to drop in. To-day some neighbours called who were seldom seen and never much liked: a troop of loud talkers, not well within the pale of good society, and therefore inclined to take up a very strong position of familiarity when they met with people too good-natured to dispute their claims: they had walked from a distance, and were not sorry to have some refreshments; they all talked at once, and Constance, who was still weak, and easily tired, could hardly command herself to second Mrs. Felton's entreaty, that they would sit down again, when a heavy shower began just as the last round of hand-shaking was over. A coarsely clouded day! and Constance felt its hours so tedious that when the visitors had left, she would fain have gone to her snug corner in the study and beguiled weariness with reading, but that her mother's face betokened an intense desire to turn the corner of the sofa back; and twice she had asked her if she was feeling unwell — she looked so dreamy — was anything occupying her thoughts? a question put in a

reproachful tone, for clearly the way the chintz pattern went did *not*.

Constance referred again to Mrs. Podmore's letter. "My dear, *I* strongly advocate your going, and the expense of the journey which you spoke of at breakfast, is a trifle compared to the advantage you might gain in re-established health; to say nothing of doing a kindness to friends in their affliction; but do not let me overrule your judgment. I only tell you how the matter appears to me." Yet the bias was effectually given.

Now that deepest mourning had become a usual appearance in the bereaved family, and that all their friends had written their letters of condolence, and assured themselves, in terms of cordial, intellectual sympathy, of Mrs. Podmore's entire submission to the Divine Will, Constance knew that the strongest floods of grief would perhaps set in; and if pity and tender kindness were all that was expected of her, she would willingly go: any way she determined to do so; her mother thought it right, and bearing hard upon the old saying, "Fais ce que tu dois, advienne que pourra," she went. This is a very good proverb, no doubt, except in cases where a careful consideration of what is likely to follow is more of a duty than the immediate performance which seems right; for the best intentions are often no safeguard against the worst results.

We all feel eased by the release of truth, however unflattering to human nature it may be: and if any one was daring enough to say that it is possible to be in greater fear of how we should receive the announcement of our neighbour's loss, than of grief for the loss itself,—that it is awkward not to feel at all, because then we know not how much we should be expected to feel,—the horrid

assertions would probably draw down general reprobation, and especially from those warm hearts who enter readily into the sorrows of their fellow-creatures: yet many might be glad that such things had got said, somehow. Certainly Constance would not have been so angry with herself as a pitiless monster if she had known, on the day she reached Clayfield Lodge, that it was not at all *unnatural* to feel more occupied by embarrassment at meeting a party of mourners, than by profound sympathy for their loss. They were all assembled in the library when she got in — firelight and a stream of devout ejaculations from the poor widow prevented Constance from feeling conspicuously silent and tearless; but when a loud sobbing burst of tears followed on voluble speech, and she saw the folded hands wringing in the freshened pangs of grief, she forgot everything but pity, and, kneeling down beside her, whispered tenderly, "Think how happy *he* is!"

It was long before Mrs. Podmore recovered herself enough to speak, and after a while, Johanna said rather drily,—

"Mother, Constance has been ill lately; she ought to rest now. If you like, Constance, we will send you some tea and a mutton chop upstairs, and then you can go to bed as early as you will."

"Thank you, but indeed I should much prefer coming down to be with all of you."

It is strange that a few words spoken in low tones should make the impression they often do, the speaker being perhaps at the moment as hard as a seal, and the heart of the hearer as soft as heated wax,— either from love or self-love, both marvellously impressible qualities.

James Podmore, who had stood leaning his head

against the mantelpiece almost ever since Constance entered, turned round now, and said, as she passed to the door, "I cannot thank you sufficiently for coming. I feel all your kindness deeply."

"Well, of course he does, poor fellow!" she thought; "he must now take a father's part with them all."

The first day of her charitable visit had its own mournful excitement. When Mrs. Podmore had told the story of her husband's death, of her presentiments —unconsciously fashioned after the fact—and his last sayings, much of the morning was gone, and she had wept herself to exhaustion: and then each of the girls had her own sad version of the same melancholy event to give in detail; and even poor Dicky wished to show the prayer his father was using when the death-stroke came; and burst out of the room as soon as the book was opened. But the next day, and the third, and the fourth, they were all at a less high-strained pitch of feeling; and then Constance began to know what an onerous post she had accepted. No letters found her out at present; and though all things here were full of remembrance of Basil, no one named him now, and she was afraid of getting upon any topic which might be associated painfully with their past. She looked at the clock all day at short intervals, as if the ending of one day would much improve her fate, when two weeks at least, of days as weary and as sad, were in prospect. She looked at the almanac, and sighed to see what a little space the long and dreaded fortnight took there,—such a short bit to mark a long penance! But marking the day for her return was soothing, and another faint cross she put against a day that came a week earlier, when she told herself she *might* hear that Burnham was again occupied, when she might very naturally write and tell

Miss Hyde where she was, and then cherish a wild hope of Basil's walking in three days after.

James Podmore walked in while she was thus amusing herself in a rare interval of solitude; and, conscious of her own thoughts only, she tried to cover her dejection with a happier look as he entered:—noticing her smile, he was more than ever certified that her compassion was mixed with even softer feelings, though evidently she was not yet aware of it herself.

CHAP. XXXV.

"The man is tiresome because he is tethered to himself; and the exactions of selfishness, even when they can domineer over our attention only for the moment, possess a subtle power of irritating the nervous system."—*Saturday Review.*

SUCH pity as gives us a vivid perception of the feelings of other people, will go far towards blinding us to our own; and it may so bring us into *rapport* with others that even their egotism will seem just and reasonable for the time. It was so in this case; either Mrs. Podmore's disagreeable peculiarities were softened by recent affliction, or sympathy had so taken the place of other sentiments in the heart of Constance that she began to see things more readily from her poor friend's point of view, and to understand better the customs of her inner life. In some degree this lessened the trial of being so much with her, and hearing in detail how invariably *everything* was against her; but no measure of pity can reconcile *taste* to habits which continually wound it; and some of Mrs. Podmore's jarred painfully upon Constance, even when she was most desirous to be able to love her. It was not only the unbridled selfishness of her nature which found expression at every turn of thought, though this gave her, when in the best temper possible, a singular art of making even her praise displeasing, and she would say, "I so particularly admire a rose!" in tones which seemed to imply that she had

the monopoly of pleasure in a rose, and that the rose had fulfilled its destiny in pleasing *her:* it was not this that put real affection towards her out of the question, nor was it her unmotherly self-consideration, which was so exhaustive that Constance sometimes thought, "Where *do* other people's lives and interest stand in this mind? they are so completely ignored that one would think she never believed in their existence;"—but it was a certain coarseness of soul that seemed to desecrate her religion. She showed it in her frequent and colloquial reference to the connection of visible success and invisible aid; she would say, while poking the fire, "I have had a most gracious answer to prayer for poor Dicky's enlightenment; I hear from Mr. Birch to-day that he can now construe two or three pages of Virgil without the usual difficulty!" And to Constance, if to none in her own family, such a remark was inexpressibly grating; she did not doubt the efficacy of prayer, even in what we call the least things, but thus to arrogate for the darkened human mind a clear sight of Divine agency, and thus to speak of the most mysterious fact in spiritual life, as if it was the simplest and most unfailing result of human faith, — and with as confident a voice as one might use when speaking of day following night,—this appeared to her a positive profanity. She dreaded the effect of such a way of talking upon herself, being obscurely conscious of the injury done to faith by the sanctified frivolity which brings into close connection the orderings of Divine Providence and all the little trifles of human interest;—and feeling sure that though *nothing* is too small for the care of an infinite Creator, yet many things are too insignificant, even in their bearings upon our earthly affairs, to be rudely associated with the Holy One in the mind of a sinful creature.

Had Constance ventured to express her dread, Mrs. Podmore would never have understood it, — a text, a groan, a shaking of the head, and a still more copious use, in family worship, of those "poor, flat, bald hymns" to which John Wesley formally objected*, would have been the only answer her conscience could allow; and when on such points intelligence is wanting, conscience naturally comes forward as its substitute.

It was a comfort, after talking with the mother on religious subjects, to turn to Johanna, whose usual reserve on such themes was made eloquent by her *practised* devotion. To her the father's death had been more of a bereavement than to any one besides; but her grief only betrayed itself by greater activity in doing good, more profound silence at home, and more declared contempt for the fashions of this world. To this last symptom, Constance was foolishly alive; she had never known such sorrow as that which poor Johanna woke up day after day to struggle with afresh, and therefore she could feel annoyed at its outward vesture.

"The more ugliness people have," she would say to herself with pettish vehemence, "the less restraint they put upon it! — why cannot Johanna wear something white between her black dress and those doleful, grim, black curls? why should people make themselves frightful because they are unhappy? I'm sure there's ugliness enough in this house already without black up to the ears!"

There was indeed. James Podmore had a so-called plainness of feature that was oppressive from its solem-

* Among the practices which Wesley objected to in the list he drew up of what he disliked in the habits of some of his followers, was "the using poor, flat, bald hymns." See Wesley's Letter to Maxwell of Nov. 2nd, 1762.

nity: he was so unpleasant to the eye of Constance, that when he had done speaking to her, she used to look quickly at some pretty object to take the taste of such ugliness from her mind; only some effect of *moral ugliness* could so pain her in a person assiduous in his attempts to please: — it *was* a coarseness of grain, and a coldness of sympathy that made him obtuse in all his dealings with other people, and apt to over-estimate his own advantages; she felt it to be so practically, but had not as yet taken theoretic cognisance of any one part of a nature so wholly discordant with her own.

It was very irksome the way James haunted her now; perhaps it was only his clumsy mode of trying to cheer his mother and sisters, or possibly he thus sought comfort for himself, though he bore little appearance of wanting it, Constance thought; but he was continually in the way whenever business allowed: even in the afternoon, when she hoped he was safe at the Bank, and she had escaped with one of the girls for a walk, James would often join them unexpectedly, with an undiscerning smile on his stiff cheeks, and either impose silence by his gravity, or try to cheer the way by making some undeniable assertions about the fall of the leaf, and the quick passing term of human life,—one period of which seemed, just then, so exceedingly long to Constance.

The crisp hush of autumn woods soothed her, and she would often have enjoyed a serene half-hour in a plantation that sheltered the back of the house; but from thence she had been driven by James, who, on several occasions, came like a spiritual policeman to inquire if such lingering, solitary walks did not foster morbid tendencies; and then offering his arm, trudged back to the house with an air of gratified prudence. He had so

dull a sense of woman's nature, that he imagined he was *encouraging* her to attach herself to him, by adopting little familiarities of manner which never fail to displease when they come too soon or too often; and when she tried delicately to intimate this, he was too slow and self-important to understand her: he *would* continue to offer advice and compliments, and while she was endeavouring by her silence to get rid of both, she felt the insisting glance of his eye waiting for the return of light from hers; she felt it, and turned away her head as if flinching under a burdensome pressure, — and yet he mistook her feelings! Perhaps she had misled him by her efforts to console and divert the grief of his home circle: she had found every one so eager to make much of her society, so besetting in their kindness, — even Johanna, though with the ungentle manner of a woman who thinks herself disagreeable, — that it was difficult to avoid reciprocal cordiality; and while everything she said or did seemed right, and giving so much satisfaction, it was to her nature almost impossible to keep any of the party at arm's length.

Her mind was in a singular degree sympathetic; so clearly did she perceive what was passing in the mind of other people, that she was involuntarily led to act or speak as much in accordance with thoughts and emotions seen *there* as with those that were self-originated: in this lay both the strength and the weakness of her character.

Now, however, she began to have a very uneasy suspicion of the cause of her present popularity at Clayfield Lodge; and one day towards the end of her visit, she took such fright at an expression of Mrs. Podmore's, — "You know, my dear, I don't mind telling *you* about this, as I regard you as one of my daughters," — that

she declined being of the general walking which James Podmore had promised to escort: she would stay at home that afternoon, though they were all going, — indeed, she felt too tired to care to go out, and should enjoy solitude.

"If you are too unwell to walk you had better have some tea at the servants' tea-time," muttered Johanna, with the severe tones of a very self-denying person who proposes a luxury which on principle she condemns.

No: Constance only wished for quiet; and she had it for about an hour, but then James came back prematurely from his walk, and joined her in the library. She had laid aside her book, and was sitting thinking by the window, when his steps warned her to take up the newspaper that lay nearest, and feign entire preoccupation. After slightly glancing at him, and an indifferent "So you are come back early!" she went on reading with evident determination not to be talked to. In a state of nervous tension, dreading a prolonged *tête-à-tête*, she sat rigid and silent, reading all sorts of things in the paper which her eyes never rested upon at other times, — corn-market news, stock-exchange reports and the like,—for fear of his speaking if she turned the paper; but just as she was reperusing this sentence, "*In re John White; the insolvent was a butcher in Stingo Lane, and was opposed by a rival in his own trade,*" a servant brought in the letters of the second post. Oh happy diversion! A letter from home; — but by what cruel malice of fate had it come into her father's head to invite James and Hester to pay them a visit at Ashenholt; — to accompany her on her return? Mrs. Felton was Fate in this instance, though the wish for James Podmore's advice about some monetary transactions was the plea she put forward to her husband.

CHAP. XXXVI.

"Being observed,
When observation is not sympathy,
So just being tortured."—MRS. BARRETT BROWNING.

"Oh que nos jugements sont courts, et feraient rire
Dans le livre de Dieu qui saurait lire!
Que nous comprenons peu les dénoûments du sort!
Et que souvent la vie est prise pour la mort!"—JOCELYN.

IT is one of the main evils of a very secluded home that there people are often forced into closer acquaintance than is always desirable: there is an unavoidable half knowledge of what is going on in your neighbour's mind, where you have continual communication with that mind only; without words you learn too quickly to interpret manner; and while your own freedom of thought is a little interfered with by what you perceive of the moods of your companion, your *unintentional* sympathy, your unexpressed consciousness of those moods is sure to aggravate and prolong them: and if this is so in homes where the worst consequence of having no mental hiding-place is that every variation of feeling is studied with undue solicitude, what misery must it occasion where dislike watches, and fear exercises almost as much penetration as love ever could! From no hostile influence did Constance suffer, and yet during the few days that James Podmore and his sister stayed at Ashenholt, she felt most uncomfortably overlooked:

she was aware, though not a word had passed between them on the subject, that Mrs. Felton narrowly observed her manner towards their guests; — she knew by the kind of *clairvoyance* which distinguishes lonely minds that her mother's spirits rose whenever James paid her one of his clumsily marked attentions; that chagrin succeeded to exhilaration when she betrayed any want of zest for his society; and that if at a good-humoured moment she took the least trouble to entertain him, the expression on her mother's face was that of wise amusement; — a look that said, "Ah! we know what *that* means!" while all the time the poor child was divided between a gentle concern for his delusion and a terror of Basil Hyde's finding him there, and misunderstanding his confident position among them; — Basil Hyde, who would have been more surprised to find *himself* than anyone else at Ashenholt now.

Hester often nettled her with affectionate innuendoes which she never would seem to understand, and James sometimes roused an uproar of pride in her heart by his encouraging airs; for he *had* got it into his head that she was of a retiring and timid disposition, and concluded that the best way to secure her affections was to take them for granted, and at once accustom her to the honour she would be naturally slow to anticipate.

The day before his return, he left Hester with Mrs. Felton in the garden, and sought out Constance, who, having a cold, was peacefully shut up in the study while her father wrote his letters; the window at her side of the room was narrow and deeply set, the day gloomy, and James's figure broad; yet just in that window he placed himself in order to plant a dull stare on the fading trees beyond it; and Constance wished to get some light for reading, but her

father was writing by the other window; her nerves were highly irritable that day; both the Podmores having bordered on sentimentality about leaving ever since breakfast: — had she liked him better, she would have asked him to take a little less awkward position; as it was she laid down her book in silent exasperation, and tried to control her thoughts; but Mr. Felton's letters were now finished, and little guessing what his daughter's anxious look betokened, he took them to the village himself. Before she could with any civility leave the room, James had asked the important question, and had been gently and firmly refused: incredulous of her serious intention to decline what he had the bad taste to reiterate, as being — though he ought not to say it, perhaps, what he believed would be considered in point of fact a somewhat *advantageous* offer — he went on urging his suit, and at last declared that he should wait patiently, hoping for a more favourable decision when she had had time for a less hurried answer. She had already moved to go, and now stood by the window, turning her face from his burdensome, expectant eyes,—that window to which she had gone for air and outlet of soul so often during awkward moments of reproof,—where she had leaned out in delicious vagueness of mood after reading books that kindled infinite enthusiasm,— or receiving letters that brought her news too welcome to be fully enjoyed in the pent-up air of a house,— that window where she had gazed for so many successive years on winter snow-wreaths, spring's first heralds, summer perfections, and autumn's dying leaves! — a leaf now floated calmly down; it woke her from the sort of trance in which she had met the early girlish self that would have felt this occasion *so* differently, and with a quick relieving sigh, she

turned round to James, and said, "I am *very* sorry if I have in any way misled you; forgive me, but I mean so entirely what I say, that it would be wrong to let you wait for any change of mind, which is impossible, I believe. Please say no more about it,—to anyone—and do not think me unkind or ungrateful." As she spoke, she saw Mrs. Felton and Hester coming towards the window, and eager to preclude any suspicion of what had passed she left the room precipitately.

Mrs. Felton watched them both that evening with especial curiosity, and could only detect that his manner was even more stolid than usual, and her's rather depressed; that she was busy finishing a purse for Dicky Podmore, and he very silent at the other side of the table. "They both feel the pain of parting," was her internal comment; for notwithstanding the little jokes Constance indulged in against him, and her oft avowed want of admiration for his character, Mrs. Felton persisted in believing that the *esteem* she professed was really something more.

Touched and softened Constance did feel that evening, and angry with herself for having before repulsed indignantly the *idea* of an offer which seemed so solemn a favour when it was actually made.

The first proposal must always make a deep impression, and give a new and unexpected feeling of interest in him who makes it; self-love begins to excuse a good many faults in one who has given such undeniable proof of attachment, and a gentle heart, generously throwing into the shade all that makes love impossible, takes due account of every estimable point; and is more ready to blame itself than to call the mistake presumption.

Constance, however, felt little compunction, for she

was guiltless of the cruel vanity of trying to attract; she thought James wonderfully blind to put any false interpretation upon her conduct, but at the same time she herself made the common mistake of attributing this blindness of his to exceeding love for her, rather than to an inordinate self-appreciation; and according to *this* version of the affair she thought him profoundly pitiable. Poor fellow! so he had been feeling all along what she did about Basil, and she had cut off all his hopes! As to that objectionable saying of his about an advantageous offer, she could see *now* what he meant; he wished to spare her all the wretchedness of very narrow means, of course, and he must have heard enough from her father in business consultations to guess how matters stood as to finance; and when he had no other persuasion to try, he was obliged to use the coarse argument of expediency for *her* sake—poor man! She wished she had been able to refer to the pre-occupation of her heart, as that might have soothed his pride, and his solicitude for her future also;—poor foolish girl! It is impossible for some natures not to idealise characters; you might as well try to prevent a magnifying lens from enlarging all objects on which it is turned.

When the Podmores left, early the next day, it was an immense relief to Constance to perceive that her mother had found out nothing about her present relations with regard to James; indeed, she fancied that it was from the notion that a tender melancholy would occupy her after their departure that she was allowed to read in peace for the rest of the morning: Mrs. Felton generally proposed some laboriously notable work as soon as the check of visitors was removed.

To-day Constance sat with her book before her, but

her mind was far away. How often had she sheltered herself from the little fretting rubs of her own life by entering quickly into the silent activity of book-life; absorbing herself in some deep question of abstract right and wrong, whilst her mother was invoking Mr. Felton's attention to some trifling point of etiquette: or when the goings on of the servants were under debate, sending her thoughts furtively to some wild region of nature,—travelling with Humboldt in vast primeval forests, or exploring Yucatan with Stephens; —this was not possible now, for she was possessed by feelings that would not be silenced; — by anxiety lest her mother should question her in some confidential hour about James Podmore, and then blame her for she knew not what degree of pride and rashness; and by a sudden dismaying idea of Basil's possible inconstancy: it *had* occurred to her before, but in a shape as dim and far distant as the faintest thunder-cloud on a calm summer horizon. *Now* she was persecuted with the thought, brought home to her by late experience,— if James Podmore *could* mistake my feelings, is it possible that I have overrated Mr. Hyde's? The fear had already taken from her the more familiar name,— she dared not think of him as "Basil" while it lasted.

CHAP. XXXVII.

"Zeit ist flüchtig und kurz, ist ein Traum, ein Flug, ein Gedanke!
Aber nur, wenn's vorüber geeilt ist; liegt auf der Schulter
Seine Last uns noch, wie langsam träg ist das Leben,
Und ein Leben wie meins!"—KLOPSTOCK.

MRS. FELTON very soon heard of the refusal from Mrs. Podmore, who wrote in a kind of upbraiding tone, loading her regretful letter with expressions of affection for Constance, and resignation under this addition to the many sorrows of widowhood; but allowing a strong tinge of pique and indignation to transpire through them all.

Mrs. Felton handed the letter to her husband without a word; he read it with lifting eyebrows, and returned it with this dry comment: "What a piece of work women make about such things!" *What* things, Constance guessed at once, because the letter was not shown to her; Mrs. Felton read a few painful extracts from it when they were alone, and then made them a text for a long and serious admonition upon fastidiousness, vanity, caprice, and undue expectations, not knowing *which* to fix upon in reprobation of her daughter's conduct, and therefore trying them all. Constance heard her with wincing nerves and a beating heart, and said at the first pause: "But, mamma, you would not think it right for me to say I would marry a person I particularly *don't* like."

No, of course not; the folly of indulging these unreasonable dislikes was just what was so very wrong, and from this nothing could exculpate her; he was a sensible, good man; not brilliant perhaps, but just the sort of person to make an excellent husband.

"But, mamma," pleaded Constance, "could *you* have married the first person who would have made you an excellent husband? whether you liked him or not?"

Certainly not, and she was the last person to advocate taking such an important step from any worldly motive; what she regretted in Constance was the too hasty judgment and a romantic turn of feeling; people were often obliged to make fancies yield to hard necessity;—she trusted that Constance might never learn this from bitter experience,—and having said this, she left the room with an air of well-controlled displeasure. Poor Mrs. Felton! she had justice enough to prevent her mental vision being obscured by self-interest, but not enough to prevent its influencing her temper, when her sanguine calculations were thrown out.

Constance was angry now; she felt injured by her mother having thought such a thing possible to *her*,—to her who considered any marriage, without the one great love—wicked; and the slight implied by the *wish* that she should marry and leave home, cut her to the heart. How cheap they must hold her who thought *this* a suitable match! that stupid, half-awakened man for her husband! what had his money to do with it?

Alas! she would understand that better ten years later, but now it was to her an incomprehensible insult, and her sense of duty and sincere affection for her stepmother could scarcely check the swellings of a proud, defiant heart.

Throughout the day she was not allowed to forget

the tenor of this painful conversation; a dancing monkey was brought to the window at luncheon time and its antics were so excessively absurd that every muscle of Mr. Felton's face had been shaken out of its usual rigidity. His wife laughed as heartily; Constance laughed only to agree with them, and when the monkey was gone, she looked at her mother in the hope of seeing some relaxation of her displeased stiffness of manner towards herself; but it was there still; she felt she was still in unrecognised disgrace, and she could not feign indifference, for it made her miserable to cause pain to those she loved. As she went upstairs to her own room, she thought bitterly how much her character was undervalued by one who could blame her distaste for James Podmore as arrogance; but when there, she walked to the bookcase, and took out a volume of Schiller (the volume Basil had marked in the summer), and while her face brightened, and, lifting itself up, shook off the angry tears, one word only escaped her in an emphatic whisper, "Immortal!"

She sat alone through the still November sunset, watching the golden light as it crept along the wall to a picture of the first Mrs. Felton, which hung over the fire-place,—a formal little figure it was, with insipid eyes, and a mouth that seemed unable to do anything but smile; it had never been like her, drawn by a bad artist, and therefore condemned to hide in a lumber-room from whence Constance had rescued it, as better to her than nothing. To-day the cold vacant face pained her as if even her dead mother refused to sympathise; but before her solitary meditations were over, she had sought and found the consolation which no fellow-creature,—not even a mother,—can supply.

Mrs. Felton sat down by the fire after dinner in that

state of feeling which combines animal quiescence with mental discouragement, and she said not a word to Constance, who felt too guilty of having caused her dejection to like to take up a book and amuse herself; and therefore suited her employment to the circumstances best, as she thought, by setting to work energetically upon some thick calico, for a poor woman's petticoat, on which every quick-drawn stitch was heard; at length her feelings of repentant self-accusation were too strong for repression, and she said abruptly:

"Mamma, I'm *very* sorry, I know you are vexed that I did not wish Mr. Podmore to like me, but really I *could* not like him. I am so sorry not to have done what you would have approved; — yet how could I?"

Mrs. Felton had not enough force of character to welcome unpalatable truths, nor strength of intellect enough to keep the sympathy of her heart warm by imagination; so she got away from the subject with only a cool and civil assent; smiling with a mixture of kindness and ridicule, she answered, "Oh my dear Constance, pray let that question rest; you know well what I and your father thought about it, but of course we should never wish to bias your feelings; I only hope you may never regret your decision in after life: — will you give me Mary's slate that lies by you, I promised to set her a sum ready for her lessons before breakfast."

Constance felt silenced and rebuffed, as indeed it was intended that she should, and mused long upon that expression, "What I and your father thought about it." It was a figure of rhetoric; Mr. Felton had not the slightest wish that his daughter should marry any one, James Podmore least of all. With his usual taciturnity he had heard Mrs. Felton's vaticinations about him;

had allowed that it was their duty not to stand in the way of a child's happiness; but having the obscure notion that most cases of an accepted offer were preceded by what *he* called flirtation, and followed by many fooleries, Constance rose in his esteem when her refusal was known, and in the depths of his reserved mind he thought that his girl might easily find some one more worthy of her love, and that with all his business-like sense, Podmore would have been an incubus, and the whole connection very worrying; his manner that evening was therefore particularly cheerful.

But Constance sat up late, feasting herself with melancholy thoughts. Oh! to see her own dear mother; to hear her soft voice say the old tender words that soothed in earliest childhood; oh! for some angel visitant to assure her that these hard ugly days were necessary for her future weal.

> "Alas! we think not what we daily see
> About our hearths,—angels that are to be!" *

There was poor Mrs. Felton in the room below reading in Pridden's "Art of Contentment" for half an hour before she said her prayers, she found it so hard to resign herself to this break up of a favourite plan; she was sure James would have been such a helpful son-in-law;—and girls knew so little of the real needs of life.

Constance little thought just then of the sorrows of this angel that was to be; and when she came down next day with her winter dress in just the same plaits that had been eyed during the wretched embarrassments of yesterday, she did not appear to her daughter in that light at all. But good principle and time, and the

* Leigh Hunt.

sense of the inevitable, reconciled Mrs. Felton to her disappointment much sooner than Constance expected, who, as usual, supposed that other minds must retain profound impressions as long as her own.

Only a few days after Mrs. Podmore's letter, as she sat in silence beside her mother, she mistook her grave pondering looks for symptoms of lasting vexation about it, and while she meditated in a fit of remorse how to make amends by some grateful service of love, Mrs. Felton looked up and said: "Constance, I am thinking what we had better have for the ottoman; if those curtains are dyed crimson, that green damask will never look well with *them*."

And so, after this little interlude of the proposal, thought and feeling returned to its habitual current; and no one at Ashenholt, except Constance and Mary, cared for any break in its routine, or had any to look forward to until Christmas should bring back Harriet Payne. Mary stimulated her imagination with the secret hope of a doll with waxen legs and arms being sent her as a surprise. Miss Hyde had spoken of such a one, when she showed her the pet doll whose arms had bled till there was nothing but kid and calico left; and Constance listened every fine afternoon for the sound of Mr. Hyde's horse coming up the drive. He had spoken in the summer of the probability of being in that neighbourhood for November hunting. Her trust in his affection was now reduced by its very meagre diet to a blind and feverish hope.

Oh! all the lookings up for a face not seen; the listenings for a step ever fancied to be near, but ever long miles distant! Oh! the little preparations for a surprise of joy which she had promised her heart so often to still its restless aching; the hurried returns

home after her walks to where he *might* be waiting for her and never was; the searching gaze when abroad to detect an object yearned for, and still not seen! These broke down her strength. Disappointment is a terrible engine; it seems as if, in very truth, it cut and wounded the mind, leaving ineffaceable scars; and the sinkings of heart that follow upon repeated disappointments, feel as if they were draining our whole nature of its vitality.

Mrs. Felton noticed her depression one day, and kindly proposed a drive. "You look a little moped this morning, dear Conny, all this foggy weather has told upon you; what do you say to making our call on the Grants? we ought to have done it weeks ago."

The suggestion was welcome to Constance. To her it was one of those sorrow-ridden days, when the burden of an unaltered grief seems almost intolerable; when to shift its pressure on the heart one eagerly accepts any new incident that may give diversion to thought: at such times a drive, a call, a letter may form an epoch—may break a weary spell.

To Mr. Felton such a mood would have seemed quite incredible; if his daughter looked pale and sad, he never guessed that she could want anything more than tonic medicines, and perhaps more exercise.

CHAP. XXXVIII.

"Or, dis-je bien. mon esperance est morte,
Or, est ce faict de mon ayse et mon bien.
Mon mal est clair: maintenant je veoy bien
J'ay espousé la douleur que je porte."

ESTIENNE DE LA BOETIE.

As they drove up to the Rectory, they saw Mrs. Grant and her sister walking peremptorily in the shrubbery with cold blue faces and their dresses tucked up; perhaps it was the keen wind in which they performed this stern duty of well-reared Englishwomen that made their manner so stiff and their greeting so cold when they came in.

Constance had just succeeded in getting some vivacity into her conversation with the younger lady, when she heard Mr. Grant say, in answer to a question about the Wratislaws: "Oh yes! I met *him* the other day, riding to the coverside,—quite well again, and your friend Mr. Hyde with him. I fancy he's staying somewhere in the neighbourhood."

"Indeed! I was not aware of that," replied Mrs. Felton; "when did you see them?"

"One day last week,—the only bright day, if you can remember when that was: what gloomy weather it has been! true November! this clear air to-day is quite a treat!"

"You will find it a very pretty pattern worked in

amber and blue," continued Constance, while her heart listened to what had just been said, and civility exacted attention to wools and elegant designs for another ten minutes; but after the forced distractions of half an hour spent with laborious talkers, all unsuspicious of her peculiar interest in some of their careless words, she came back to her usual home thoughts with the sensation of a dreamer who wakes to grim reality; and tries in vain to think it but another dream.

Here was the plain fact, Mr. Hyde had been in their near neighbourhood, and had not come to see her.

As soon as she reached her room, before bonnet and shawl were thrown off, she sat down to ponder on what she had heard. If she *had* lost his affection, *how* had she lost it? What had become of at least his good opinion of her? A thing easily lost among common acquaintances; a word or two may pass, and it will be forfeited; a look be misinterpreted, or a report of true facts untruly stated, and good opinion may be gone for years: — but *he* who read her very soul, how could he misinterpret? She forgot that he might no longer care to read it; she forgot that though love may be unfeigned, yet "Time qualifies the spark and fire of it,"—that,

> "this *would* changes,
> And hath abatements and delays as many
> As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents." *

She thought long and found no solution of her enigma; she wept long and bitterly, while the dull light of a hidden sunset gleamed coldly from under a mass of cloud, and threw all her silent room into ghastly lightsomeness, until the night shut in starless and windy.

* Hamlet, Act iv. Sc. vii.

But hope woke with her the next morning; and when Mrs. Felton remarked: "I rather wonder that Mr. Hyde did not call when he was so near," she could reply with cheerful animation: "Oh, I daresay he was wanted to go hither and thither all the time he stayed; and Mr. Wratislaw wished all his sporting friends to see him no doubt."

"Yes, but for his aunt's sake I should have thought *he* would have wished to see us; however we do not know that he has left the county yet; perhaps he may still ride over."

"I do not think he will," said Constance, in the most impassive tones, for she fancied her mother was on the look out for emotion. She was mistaken; both Mr. and Mrs. Felton had heard the Hydes speak of Elinor Lee with a degree of tenderness that *they* naturally attributed to an understood, though still undeclared engagement; and thus many little things escaped their observation which otherwise might have led them to guess the truth. Constance was glad of anything that could conceal her feelings, and though she believed this false impression existed, she did not try to remove it.

The day passed, and no one called but Miss Tennent; at dessert time Constance sat by the fire on a low stool, peeling walnuts for her father: little Mary having fallen down and hurt herself, was taken upstairs by her mother to be comforted in the nursery.

A crackling wood fire lit up the dining-room, and shone brightly upon a carved wooden figure that stood upon the bookcase opposite.

"How well that old man looks now!" said Constance, just to break the silence. "I wonder who he was meant for; it looks such a real face."

"One of the popes, Hyde said; I forget which."

"Mr. Hyde! when *could* he have seen it?"

"When he was here, to be sure, in the summer."

"But papa, you did not bring it down from the attic room till the day before the picnic,— don't you remember, you brought it down in fun, and told mamma the old wooden man would do much better to escort us there than you; — you so disliked going."

"Well, my love, I daresay your memory is better than mine, but unquestionably Hyde saw it, and praised its execution,— it must have been when he called *after* the picnic day, I suppose."

"*Did* he call after that day, papa? Mamma and I never heard of it."

"Ay; you and your mother were both out, I think: he looked wretchedly; but I heard of no bad news, so I asked no questions, but walked him over my farm: pity he does not do something. Idleness is enough to ruin any man."

She hardly heeded the last few words; she was piecing together all she could recollect of the fortnight after that too memorable day, and soon recalling her one absence in the woods, when she thought it impossible that Basil could come, she saw not only what she had missed, but also how easily her father's manner might have misled him; — then, fancying her silence noticeable, she said, "Oh! I suppose that was the day mamma was so busy nursing Miss Tennent! — I chance to remember that I was out half that day," she added, confused by her own exactness.

"May be so;" said Mr. Felton, stroking her hand musingly. Almost she resolved then to ask him her heart's riddle, to get his pity, his advice; — he looked so kind and ready for her confidences: it would be *such* a relief to know if *he* thought any one could say so

much and mean so little as to forget her afterwards; but no, she *could* not volunteer her secret; and she had the instinct that tells us how different may be the light in which our heart-troubles are regarded at different times, even by a father: in softened moods pity and love may plead for our weakness, in a time of warm twilight like this it would look less foolish than in broad daylight when business had to be done, and hard facts to be dealt with; *then* he and her mother might talk it over coldly, or she would fancy that they did; and each time either of them were silent or looked grave, her timidity would see sternness and imagine disapproval: it was perhaps wise to keep her own secret; and besides her father moved to ring for more coal.

Another and another day, and a slight fall of snow was the only fresh arrival at Ashenholt. There is something inexpressibly mournful in the close of a day which has passed over, like many a one before it, without bringing what would have made the darkest hour bright; to see the sun mount and travel on, and fling its still glory on everything, but not on the face we long to see again; to watch its declining, and find evening coming on to bury another day's hope in the unquiet grave of sleep;—to remember how full of action and feeling this slow-paced day must have been to many, and how without any distinctive impress it has weighed and worn on ourselves. This is sad, and this slowly consumes many a youthful heart. Night brings some soothing for "the constant anguish of patience,"* for while reason sleeps love may still be happy.

* Evangeline.

Constance was roused one night by what sounded like a cry of distress,—she started from the animated world of dreams, and shaking off the entrancing spells of a voice that spoke *there* so tenderly, she stood listening at the window, and looking upon the dark world without, where hoarse winds carried on their wrathful work; it was their shrill cry that had awakened her. The landscape lay under a gloomy curtain of cloud which only allowed enough of moonlight to escape for the outline of dreariest objects to appear in ugly nakedness;—patches of snow not yet swept away by the bitter wind; tossing branches of unresting trees; graves of summer flowers studding the frost-bitten lawn;—looking on these she felt as if suddenly brought within sight of a terrible conspiracy, for woe and horror, and relentless fate seemed to be talking with raised voices of the doom impending on those who now slept in warm and peaceful unconsciousness. There was a sublime element in her feelings then: the following day *her* doom came from the mouth of Mr. Wratislaw, who called with another gentleman at luncheon time, and mentioned amidst eager talking that Basil Hyde had returned home a week ago. Nothing more was said about him, except that he had had some capital days' hunting, and looked uncommonly well.

Now, for the first time, she believed that he had indeed forgotten her, and how she succeeded in getting through that hour without anguish that could not be concealed she knew not; but strong feeling stupifies sometimes by its excess. She only felt that life must now begin on new terms, and that for the present all was too dizzy within her to see what was changed. She had no hope and no comfort from religion that day; every ray of its light seemed gone, and she blamed herself

coldly for faithlessness, because, though never doubting that there *was* comfort, even for her, she was unable to feel any. Perhaps there is in the life of every true Christian some one point of private experience which makes it difficult — all but impossible — to believe in an unfailing, special providence: the day of the picnic formed her temptation in this way now, and for many after years.

Ah! in earlier times a hymn-full of piety had generally sufficed to soothe and strengthen her; she had now got into such deep waters that the whole stress of her spirit lay upon a single sentence of Scripture: "Call upon me in time of trouble and I will hear thee." And she did call, though faintly, and with no immediate perception that the Lord was "mindful of her tears."

She wondered that neither her father nor mother remarked upon her sorrowful countenance; that Mary could run after her down the passage with that merry, heedless laugh, and not see how her mouth quivered when she said, "Not to-day dear; I'm *so* tired!" She felt so perfectly miserable that she wondered how such unhappiness could pass unobserved; — child that she was still! she thought her own grief the worst burden under which any woman's heart could sink; but her pathetic view of her own grief was in itself a consolation. There *are* troubles devoid of any pathos, of any romance, which poison as they wound; compared to these her grief was simple, though intense.

The cold weeks wore away; she had never felt the cold so much before, for what web of pleasant fancies had she now to exclude the dreary impressions of sense? much of her afternoons was spent by the drawing-room fire: there she could sit idle, for Mrs. Felton was usually laughing with her child, at that time, over the nursery

tea; and even when she was downstairs, discordant and wretched as Constance felt, she did not dare retreat to her own room, for cold and darkness,—her most prevailing foes, were encamped there, and she no longer felt able to make head against them with a fur tippet and a hand candle.

One dull December day she sat thus over the fire, before it was time for candles, gazing upon the quick-moving flames with almost envious eye; *they* were going on, doing their work, warm and fast, she living in a state of melancholy torpor: nothing seemed worth doing now; what *could* she do? without, all was just and usual; within—who could measure the difference to her between this December and the last?

"Still idle!" said Mrs. Felton gaily, coming in with her basket full of needlework. "What *is* the matter, my dear? you seem quite given up to dreaming; are you feeling unwell?"

"I'm *very* miserable," said Constance, in a paroxysm of distress.

She allowed herself this outcry, feeling as if the strength of her sorrow must bear down the apathy and chill disregard of a happier person: she thought such grief must be accredited by its accents of truth, and then would be deeply pitied,—ay! about as much as the wind pities or heeds the outcry of a wrecking man. Mrs. Felton would have been all tenderness had she been able even to guess what made her miserable; if it had been a *whole* confidence, no one would have been more truly compassionate; but as Constance had acknowledged nothing more than great depression, her burst of complaint was met with that arid cheerfulness, which plumes itself on despising fanciful grief, and

condemns, on principle, any state of mind which refuses to look on the bright side of things.

With a slight accent of tonic severity, Mrs. Felton replied, "My dear, you really must learn more self-control, if you wish to keep your place in my esteem; suppose you run upstairs and dress, and try to forget all these dismalities; and then before dinner we can have some of our old duets; we are getting quite out of practice."

CHAP. XXXIX.

"Oui, Madame, je suis toujours las;
Je suis las, et de plus j'ai un poids sur le cœur."
Chansons de la Bretagne.

"How am I cast out of al swetenes of blisse, and mischevously stongen by passed joy."—CHAUCER.

WHEN Harriet Payne returned for the holidays, Constance found her dejection increase: she felt that one who looked sad must always seem in the wrong compared to a cheerful person; she fancied, when she left the room, that her cousin or Mrs. Felton was likely to begin sighing and wondering at her sad looks; and when she came back, to follow up their remarks with a quantity of good advice, and inapposite citation of instances which proved the *liver* to be the seat of all melancholy.

Harriet was sure that if Constance would but take a glass of cold water the first thing in the morning, and walk regularly for half an hour at some most inconvenient time of day, she would soon be well; and Mrs. Felton added that she must really rouse herself to take more interest in what passed around her; books were all very well in their way, but if reading led to a dissatisfied turn of feeling, &c. &c.

All this was wisely meant, but it was fine torture to the sick-hearted girl, and made her even more silent than

before. She was getting peevishly fastidious, and disliked and avoided the common little tricks of expression to which Harriet was prone; she regarded her now with the natural disaffection of the unhappy for all that causes a painful contrast in people of glad spirits. Harriet's whole being seemed now so exuberantly successful; Constance had never really loved her character, it was her warm affection that she had loved, and of this she began to doubt because her own heart was so impoverished; when a great hope dies, how much beside dies with it!

In every spiritual desert there are wells, but how often they are hidden from us until Heaven opens our eyes; they lie close by and yet we do not see them. The home-love felt for poor Constance was deep and warm enough to bring her much consolation, but at that time she could not feel it. Her relations grieved for her and longed to make her happy, while she was only resenting their solicitude as interference. Had she been able to take any true measure of the burden on her mother's heart,—the daily anxiety over bills that far exceeded previous estimates,—and the wife's frequent heartache for being unable to exhilarate her silent, careworn husband,—the degree of attention given to her own low spirits would have appeared as truly loving as it was; but she was now too self-occupied to perceive this, and the dealings of God and man seemed to her alike hard and irritating. She confessed to feeling unwell, and resigned herself to taking a cordial which Miss Tennent had kindly prepared, after having discussed her symptoms with even more diffuseness than generally belongs to the feminine joy of "talking a matter well over." Her bodily health suffered, but her soul was under a long eclipse, and suffered much more:

even her father observed her depressed manner and often tried to amuse her; but at that time she would rather do anything for people than smile at them, or carry on their small jokes with appreciating good-humour.

Morning and evening greetings were a trouble which she was glad to have got through; her sad, chagrined face being then looked at fixedly; and Harriet's full resonant kisses cost her an effort to endure.

Harriet had been taking temporary duties as a governess in the house of Sir William Eddowes, the early friend who had shared the expenses of her education with Mr. Felton. After the Easter vacation she was to undertake a very advantageous situation obtained for her by Lady Eddowes, who gladly engaged her services during the intervening months for her own children, their regular governess being absent on sick leave. Elated by a prospect so agreeable to her tastes, Harriet had come to Ashenholt very joyous and very complimentary.

It puzzled Constance to hear incessant praises downstairs, from one whose private comments were habitually disparaging, and generally included the tiresome phrase of, "I don't know what Lady Eddowes would think of such out of the way fashions!" and then Harriet's manner was altogether too *prevenante;* Constance, having felt, as *she* believed, the coldness of her cousin's nature in her frequent rallying attacks, could not reconcile herself to all this surface warmth; and she saw that there was too much of it for her father's liking.

Mrs. Felton, on the contrary, was highly gratified, and wished for a little more of such suavity in Constance, while *she* was thinking impatiently, "Where shall I find

the core of Harriet's real self in all this frothy stuff? however little she really feels, I should like to get at it, a grain of truth being better than a pound of composition."

She was wrong to judge this fault of Harriet's so severely; it was no doubt a proof of great deficiency, of a low degree of real affection; but from a child it had been aggravated by her position in life; partial dependence, developing self-reliance, had also developed the need, with the power, of prepossessing other people in her favour, and almost unconsciously, she addressed herself to please and to suit the feelings of those about her, without sufficiently attending to the truth of her own; these were for the time lost sight of.

Constance used to sit by in grim silence, while Harriet caressed little Mary with a thousand endearments; five minutes after, she had remarked, when they were alone, "What an odious little thing that child will be, if aunt goes on spoiling her as she does!" and when the same affectionate tone was applied to herself, she withdrew from it in secret displeasure.

Christmas came, when every one who has much leisure for thought feels in some respects like a ghost, less living in the present than dreaming over the past; haunting former scenes and listening to the voices of other times. So at least it was with Constance, for whom this present had so little interest; but Mr. and Mrs. Felton, did they look back while praising their Christmas beef? did Harriet while busily preparing a *toilette* for the possible chance of a party at the Wratislaws? And yet if the past did not occupy these minds, some dim fears for the future surely did, so earnestly did each person reiterate good wishes for a happy Christmas, and many of them; — for all feel at marked

seasons that each may be the last to some one among us.

Christmas Day was to Constance a day of absorbing headache: she knew more of the particular shades of colour on the carpet, the rotund figure of the curtain tassels, and the movements of several robins at the window-sill than of any other sight,—a time of pain, far easier to bear than sorrow. Sunday came next, and then Monday, when every one in the house seemed to return to their weekly avocations with zealous industry; every one was busy, while she felt no adequate motive for doing anything; from the weary task of dressing to the final effort of evening music, every little process was quite an operation of principle; and withal she was conscious of an inward hurry and unrest, which made it hard to do anything deliberately though all was done with reluctance.

The post brought her a letter from Adelaide, containing news of her engagement to the hero of her fancy in the previous summer;—there was not much to be *told* in his favour; a handsome, young guardsman with small means, and only remote prospects of having enough to marry upon,—but she was in ecstasies; her parents had consented, and all her friends were pleased.

Any engagement, however unpromising, is favoured by the majority of people; if for no kinder reason, because it brings about a new crystallization of interests, and assumes the existence of strong emotion, which is always eagerly sought for in a state of society where it seldom can be seen.

Mrs. Felton, after a few prudent observations, gave way to sympathetic satisfaction; and several times in the course of the day, spoke of the good sense which enabled a girl to form a happy attachment, instead of

allowing herself to be led away by romantic whims. Constance, having quick discernment, could well see where her mother's thoughts left the wide stream of generalization to direct particular applications to her own line of conduct, and with a good deal of inflammatory action going on in her mind, she listened, only remarking aloud:

"Adelaide says she has seen very little of Captain Trevor; I hope she is a good judge of character."

Long before dressing-time, she escaped to her own room: it was too dim and chill for any employment: the afternoon was one of those stagnant times of partial thaw, when all that is left of light seems prematurely quenched by a universal film of cold darkness. She stood watching the outer world, where all seemed dying or obscured; and the dusky sky, where no sunset tints crept over the uniform grey; and no space was left for the soft surprise of stars: as she looked out, she thought of her own life, its present and its future,—Ah! there she could find nothing more bright,—no, not the distant hope of glory,—and starting as footsteps sounded on the stairs, she struck a match with numbed hands, to see how long her reveries had beguiled her; there was no time left for tears.

Apparently, Mrs. Felton's tone had awakened Harriet's curiosity and led to questions, while Constance was out of the room, which elicited the story of James Podmore's suit; for when the girls went up to their rooms at night, Harriet begged to stay for a little talk, and at once plunged into the subject with such sincere and hearty kindness that there was no resisting her petition for confidence. Did not Constance now regret her refusal, she anxiously inquired,—probably she had found too late that she really loved Mr. Podmore,—no-

thing would be easier than for aunt to drop a hint to this effect in a letter to his mother, she would herself ask her aunt to do so,—Constance should have nothing distressing to say or to do!—this, and much more was poured out with earnest gestures, while Constance sat nervously twisting her sash, and longing, but still hesitating, to enjoy the luxury of confession. "No, no, indeed!" she replied with alarm.

"Then it's some one else you are fretting about. I know! it's that Mr. Hyde, who came in the summer,—there, I see I am right; now *do*, dear, tell me all about it: I daresay it will end happily still! Oh! *don't* look so wretched! you know people always go through all kinds of disaster before they marry, and live very happy to the end of their lives. Oh, Conny, do not cry; it's only some mistake!"

But Constance was crying passionately now, leaning her head against a table to hide the force of her sobs; self-command was gone, pride overthrown, love startled from its fortresses: as soon as she could speak, she told all to Harriet who knelt beside her, pressing her trembling hands with a kindly clutch at every pause in the common history of simple facts and complex feelings, where modesty shrunk from asserting what reason itself put beyond doubt; and the trifles that had convinced the heart, seemed at once too small and too precious to be brought in as evidence to satisfy another and a colder judgment.

Ten minutes before Harriet was the very last person whom Constance would have thought of making a confidante, yet now she was a comforter as well; she did not only pity; but, with her usual coarsely trenchant good sense, she gave advice, and pronounced a decided opinion: and having seen much more variety of life

than her cousin, she could do this with an air of authority, which took great effect. Constance had no doubt been ridiculously scrupulous; men were not diviners, and if women draw back more and more when they really care about them, how were they to guess that their addresses would be acceptable? Constance had no notion how easily a man's pride took fire, a mere nothing would often repulse; — she could give many instances of this;—it was all nonsense to talk of secret sympathies and *unexpressed* feeling being understood,— in poetry they might be, not in real life; and clearly Constance had trusted too much to these, and done all she could on many occasions to make Mr. Hyde think her indifferent to him; but it was quite as clear that *he* was attached, and only kept away from pique, or jealousy — he had perhaps heard some false report of Mr. Podmore's visit, and now the best thing to do was to undeceive him, to contrive to meet him, and then be more explicit; she was *sure* it was not too late; misunderstandings like these were very common; this would easily be explained and all would come right.

The clock struck twelve just as the eager speaker had reached this happy climax; and after giving her promise that no one else should know what they had been talking about, and receiving the grateful thanks of restored hope, she left Constance in a maze of newly-shaped ideas. It had not occurred to her before that James Podmore's visit might have been misinterpreted; she would say something about him in her next letter to Miss Hyde that should set *that* error to rights.

Harriet's words acted upon her like a reviving stimulant; with her theory she could not agree, but it might wisely be remembered in order to modify the extreme scrupulosity of her own practice. And the

next day her adviser had the pleasure of seeing a brighter eye and quicker step, and every day till she left the cousins had a deeply interesting topic for their private conversations, and Constance took less offence at Harriet's want of delicacy.

But is it wise to take any third person into counsel upon the mutual relations of two hearts that have been distanced from each other? Is it possible that any advice can quite meet a case that must be embarrassed by the peculiarities of individual character? Seldom, if ever; and yet too often the kindness and sympathy of an ignorant arbiter may support the fantastic claims of a feeling that *ought* to die, and human friends will often urge us to hope when God has said "Resign."

Basil Hyde and his aunt *had* heard from Mrs. Podmore just at the time when she was most secure in her expectations of a docile daughter-in-law from Ashenholt. They were both surprised at the implied prospect, but neither of them had spoken about it. Basil had looked cool astonishment; his aunt's tone in reading the passage expressed as much, but from some instinct of civilised nature nothing was said.

Constance now wrote ostensibly to wish Miss Hyde a happy new year; really to refer to Mr. Podmore's visit as having been "appily very short." The letter was long, much too long, full of the quiet nothings that take the place of stirring events in country life; but Miss Hyde thought good to read it aloud to Basil, while he finished his breakfast, as a "very pleasing letter."

"There could not be a more delightful style of letter-writing," he said, as the many sheeted cover-full was laid down, "supposing, of course, that you wished for a description of the seasons and of their effect upon the human mind. How glad a South Sea islander might be

of such information! really, aunt, that young missionary fellow, Reed, might be under great obligations to such a correspondent!"

Miss Hyde put away the letter with chagrin, observing that it was hard to laugh at people when they kindly intended to please.

"My dear aunt, *pray* spare me upon the subject of good intentions; if you wish to leave me a chance of moral improvement, do not bring *them* forward as the source of stupid results; it is enough to make one vicious to see all the wearisome dulness and absolute defects which people try to cover with the plea of good intentions."

On this same plea he rode off a few hours later to inquire after Mr. Cartaret who was laid up with gout; an unnecessary piece of civility, considering that he had danced half the evening before with his daughter; and Miss Hyde looked on anxiously to results for which no good intentions would compensate.

CHAP. XL.

"Kaum habe ich nun die Stadt, diese Mauern, und die Aemsigkeit der Menschen gesehen, so ist alles in meinem Gemüthe wieder wie zugeschüttet, ich kann die Plätze meiner Freude nicht wiederfinden; ich weiss nicht mehr was ich bin; mein Sinn ist ganzlich verwirrt. Mein Zutrauen zu mir scheint mir Raserey, meine inwendigen Bilder sind mir abgeschmackt."—LUDWIG TIECK.

THE rest of the winter passed away in quiet monotony: Mr. Felton had become still more disinclined for society, for he was much out of spirits; and affectionate anxiety enabled Constance now to put a brighter mask upon her own sorrows. But while she strove by all the means in her power to make herself a cheerful companion, she endured in secret the wearying alternation,

"Betwixtin hope and dark desesperance:"

no longer chafing against the trial, but so meekly accepting its pains, and feeling so unworthy of their being changed to joy that, in the depths of her heart, she thought patience was being thus severely tested only as a prelude to great and *unexpected* happiness: for so can the human mind play upon itself, and fondly continue to prepare for the portion it refuses to expect.

People must find real pleasure in meeting, to induce them to bear in the winter the many discomforts of visiting, and consequently the Feltons saw but little of their neighbours; at no time were they popular; living,

as they did, in rather a large house with a very small income, was truly a social disadvantage; for the first was an obvious fact, the second not so well known, and the discrepancy between what was looked for at Ashenholt, and what was done, occasioned many a false interpretation.

Shyness, was, as usual, mistaken for *hauteur;* and encounters with rich neighbours were often disagreeable and misleading to both parties: as, for instance, when taking Harriet to the nearest railway station, Constance met the Ords there, who thought her more proud and repulsive than ever. It is true that being in her shabbiest cloak and a faded bonnet, she was, from painful self-consciousness, even less cordial in addressing them than her customary shyness allowed her to be; but her remark to her mother on this meeting was, "I thought the Ords would be ashamed to speak to me, I felt so shockingly untidy, in this old wet-day cloak."

It would have been well for her if they, or any of her acquaintance, had drawn her out of herself, for the seclusion in which she lived was now become dangerously calm. She felt the tyranny of fixed ideas, and hungered for some change—some distraction, as necessitously as a starving man hungers for bread.

Towards the end of April Mrs. Felton received a letter from Lady Eddowes, inviting her and Mr. Felton, and both the girls, to spend a fortnight at Richmond before Harriet left; if they could not all make it convenient to leave home at the time named, Lady Eddowes hoped Miss Felton would not refuse to come, her cousin had told them so much about her, that it would give them great pleasure to make her acquaintance.

Harriet wrote also, and in a tiny note enclosed in her

main letter, she said, "Do not refuse, dear Conny. With me here, you will not mind strangers, and it may lead to a meeting elsewhere. A gentleman often stays here who is intimate with General Lee and his daughter, and probably knows some one else; *do come*, and don't be a shy goose: it will do you a world of good to have a little gaiety, and Lady Eddowes is *very* kind."

Mr. and Mrs. Felton had no wish to accept the invitation for themselves; for Constance they thought it most desirable to do so; her mother had longed to procure for her some pleasant change, and now caught at this with delight.

"My dear, I wish you would go: I am sure it will be the very best thing for you, and it is so kindly proposed that it would be quite rude to decline, with no better reason than shyness."

At first it seemed to Constance an impossibility to venture among strangers all alone, but, after weighing the inducement Harriet had held out, and listening to all her father and mother said about the benefits of amusement now and then, she gave a reluctant consent; and while they continued to speak of the probable pleasures in store for her, of the exhibitions and concerts to which she might go, one hope alone reconciled her to going, — the hope of meeting Basil.

Having Harriet to talk to about him again would be a certain comfort; and her buoyant, self-appreciating presence would be a great defence to her among new people. But this comfort and defence she was fated to lose: the very day before she left home, too late for any change of plan, Lady Eddowes wrote to say how *very* sorry she was that the cousins should be disappointed of meeting, but her friend Mrs. Lycett had suddenly lost her father; and being obliged conse-

quently to be absent from home some little time, had begged Miss Payne to come three weeks sooner, and take charge of her children: the request was urgent, and Harriet had complied, much to Lady Eddowes inconvenience as well as to her sincere regret; "but," she added, "we shall be able to contrive a meeting for the cousins before many days are over."

With firm resolve to conquer needless fear, Constance entered the grand-looking hall at Sir William Eddowes, but it was with consternation that she found herself in a drawing-room occupied not only by several people then staying in the house, but—during the first half-hour after her arrival — by a gay succession of callers. Lady Eddowes was extremely gracious, but, when she had spoken a few words of cordial welcome, was obliged to attend to other guests, and the younger lady to whom she introduced Constance as "my niece, Mrs. Herbert Forbes," was not quick in relieving her of shyness by conversation. A short sentence to her, and then a run of lively comments upon things or people unknown, addressed to a lady on her other side, gave Constance time to look about her, and notice what her eye always fell on first, the beautiful flowers in every part of the room. How absurd of her to bring the basketful of hyacinths and anemones that she had modestly left with her over-shawl,—though she had thought them well worthy of presentation, until this minute.

When speaking of the effects of smoking *Cannabis sativa* among the Batoka, Dr. Livingstone says, that "like opium, it produces different effects in different individuals; some view everything as if looking in through the wide end of a telescope, and others in passing over a straw, lift up their feet as if about to cross the trunk of a tree."*

* Livingstone's Travels, chap. xxvii. p. 541.

Solitary habits affect the mind in the same degree with regard to the very least trifles of social existence. *Every* straw seemed a gigantic trunk to the country visitor now, and at each, she seemed to herself to stumble disgracefully; when she made any remark, she overheard it, and thought it sounded such a *sottise* that she fancied those nearest her were looking at her with astonishment, — with the surprise that means dislike; and for this fancy there was of course no natural limit or disproof; and when she left the drawing-room, she went out with precipitation — as a retreating soldier leaves the field of battle, — expecting flying shots of sarcasm to follow.

Even in her own room (where she settled to keep the flowers, as long as she could, to talk to her of the garden at home), she did not feel herself; and perceived that even the ladysmaid, who came to assist her in dressing, was puzzled by her shy manner and morbid flow of thanks for the kindness of unpacking and arranging her things, — her little humble belongings seemed so unfit for this elegant-looking person to have put away in punctilious order; but, poor girl! she had had cause for confusion when the maid came in, for in her hasty search for some ribbons she had meant to bring and left at home, the top of the box had twice clapped down sharply (as ill-made boxes will), and knocked her stooping head.

Dinner-time was dreadful. There seemed to her such a number of people when they went in, though Sir William spoke of their *reduced* party. His children were too young to appear. Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Forbes were the only relations present.

After dinner Lady Eddowes came and sat down by Constance, and asked more particularly about Mr. and

Mrs. Felton. She spoke with the quick tone of a preoccupied mind. To Constance it sounded daunting, sounded as if she was a despised bore receiving kindness. It meant nothing of the sort, and was the inevitable tone of one who has to get through ever-accumulating loads of social business, a manner which people used to much society or much business generally contract; and unless they did, half they have to do in life would be stranded beside the slow stream of inactive thought and tardy, obstructive conversations. But Constance had not learned this, and on being asked whether her father and mother often came to town, she so completely lost self-possession as to answer with embarrassment: "No, indeed, papa *could* not afford anything so expensive; he is obliged to be very careful now, because ——"

"True! true," broke in Lady Eddowes, evidently wishing to avert her visitor's ill-timed comfidences; "but now I think I must have tired you with my questions, and we will have some music. Mrs. Grey, I know we shall enjoy your songs if Frances (turning to her niece) will accompany you on the piano."

Poor Constance! To say she spoke with confusion does but ill describe the truth. Confusion of manner, when one instinct bursts down the barriers of reserve from another—one thought shames the half-begun expression of another into silence—one feeling stings to the quick the heart that is throbbing with another: is not to be put into words, no dashes and broken sentences can represent the broken, humbled, bitter condition of a sensitive person speaking or acting with confusion.

Lady Eddowes was very kind, and laboured in her own way to set her at ease, but never having experienced any sensation similar to the misery of her shy

guest, she could not divine how to allay it; and after Constance had been floundering about in a conversation which was intended to make her feel comfortable and at home, and had perpetrated several grotesque blunders from sheer paralysis of nerve, Lady Eddowes could not imagine that it would have been kinder to talk on and lead her towards some subject on which she could feel more indifferent, than abruptly to propose music and organise singing duets for half an hour, leaving her with the remembrance of *gaucheries* and solecisms rankling in her fastidious mind. Nothing short of clairvoyance can instruct an unnervous nature, blessed with social effrontery, in the secret and manifold woes of a poor "sensitive."

Looking at Lady Eddowes' two little daughters, who were found in the drawing-room, Constance quite envied their address, their cool and finished politeness; and both were under fourteen years old. Every one present seemed to her on a comfortable footing except herself; she concluded that all but herself were at ease with their entertainers; for she had not yet had time to observe the tension of manner in Mrs. Grey (a vulgar, rich, good woman, asked to the house of Sir William as one likely to be useful in his approaching canvass in ——shire), whose conversation was with difficulty rarified to subjects which she supposed Lady Eddowes might relish, and who seldom ventured to exceed the limits of a short and cautious inquiry, whether her ladyship was "partial to Mr. Jones, the new curate?" or "accommodated yet with a young woman in her nursery?" and she left the next day, so her position with the Eddowes remained undiscovered by the new comer.

But another guest, in spite of her ladylike serenity,

struck Constance as pitiable, from a very unusual malformation of mouth and chin. Her pity was not misplaced; into the sorrows of that poor girl's life the irregular feature had often intruded, and made painful fancies fact; it had embarrassed manner, stifled enthusiasm, and chilled hope. Alas! during what critical hours of life had the sense of that disfigurement instilled unremovable bitters! It had been a mark for rude staring and secret surprise; it had debarred her from the usual facilities of society, and kept her ever in her own view.

This evening she sat apart by a window, observing the young stranger, and thinking how prettily shaped that gentle-looking face was; while Constance believed her silence intended to distance, and did not venture to address her.

Having been generally used to small households, where a Jane and Sarah, or a Martha and Anne, with only an incidental Betty at busy times, formed the staff of female servants, the long row that stood at the end of Sir William's dining-room at prayer-time oppressed her with something like awe.

Wearied in mind and body she retired to her room, where all the luxurious furniture looked as if it professed to secure absolute comfort, though she knew there was not a chance of comfort for *her* while she remained in sight of it. False shame had got her mind in its merciless grip; she was ashamed of herself and of all her external accoutrements; not only from the sense of present exigency, but from the fear of unprovidedness during her stay in this great house; the thought of the next week bringing to it other guests, and only more shabbiness to her precarious toilette, was, without exaggeration, dreadful; for imagination drew round her

a perfect phantasmagoria of petty disgraces. Her *amour propre* had been bitterly hurt that day, and she had had no time for reflection, for finding out *what* had so miserably robbed her of peace. Until this can be done humiliations exasperate; when we can gather strength to say, "I exposed myself to ridicule on such an occasion," or "I behaved very absurdly and excited just surprise," more than half the pain is at an end in a well-disciplined mind, because the honesty and discernment we thus exercise puts us a little more in good conceit of ourselves.

CHAP. XLI.

"We are always hampered and influenced by persons and circumstances. A teaspoon may put us out of countenance if it is of gold instead of silver; and thus, paralysed by a thousand considerations, we can never give a free vent to whatever greatness there may be in our nature. We are slaves to the objects; they contract us into insignificance, or swell us out into important proportions."—GOETHE.

THE next morning while dressing, Constance heard the incessant tinkle of practising on the pianoforte (for the school-room was next to hers), a cheerful noise in itself, but not so to her who dreaded the little worlds-women from whom it proceeded: how she shrunk from their unrelenting scrutiny — from the expression of assured propriety in their deportment,— she who had no assurance now about anything except this, that she was deficient in all that can make a person happy among strangers.

How long and endless the morning seemed, though it was in May "the month of blossoms;" and she was walked out into a lovely garden by her hostess, and *could* speak of flowers with some confidence; but she fancied the very lilacs and honeysuckles wondered at her altered manner towards them; she who usually could not content herself with merely looking at them when they first came out, but who kissed the dew from their leaves, or touched the blossom tenderly, now passed them with

a sad, constrained regard, and could not stretch out her hand to gather, as she walked slowly beside Lady Eddowes. This one circle of stately life seemed all at once to suck in and annihilate everything that was vivid and enjoyable; here she felt as if all her former pleasures had ceased to be, and, as for the one great hope, it appeared irretrievable from the moment she reached the place, because it so drew out her follies, and exposed her *néant*, that it was treason to Basil's taste to think she could please him: she felt as if *all* interests were cancelled; as if her uncle Graham had never written to her on themes which made her feel more immortal than human; — as if the children at the village school had never been the better for her toils; — as if for her the moon no longer shone, nor waters glittered, nor throngs of roses bloomed; — in short, her real life was suspended, and only a forced semblance of interest kept her energies in play.

Returning to the morning-room, on the plea of writing letters, she found Mrs. Herbert Forbes at play with her three little ones: it was pretty happiness to watch; the mother's *bons mots* were so rapturously applauded by the merry group; there was such keen enjoyment of her fun. Surrounded by her children the most commonplace mother becomes witty — to them, if only she has health enough to bear their noisy pranks.

Constance caught the contagion of their mirth, and having several times helped Johnny to find his ball, Mrs. Forbes began to take more notice of her. She was a young, fond mother, and felt pleased with any one who "played so nicely with the children."

"You live near here I think," she said with a gracious smile.

"No; a long way off,— in —— shire."

"Ah! I thought my aunt said you had just come from Kensington,—but it was one of your sisters she spoke of perhaps who had been at school there," she added with an absent air, while busily engrossed in fastening up little Bessie's hair in a prettier style.

"It was my cousin, very likely," Constance replied, almost inaudibly, not caring to set such a heedless questioner right. These trifling mistakes strike a deep chill into the heart of inexperienced visitors; having known little of life beyond their own, it surprises them to find any one so completely ignorant of all that concerns them most.

Constance rallied her courage, and tried all through that day to support a forced gaiety; but there was no gaiety in her conversation—only the vivacity of one who tries to drill her nerves to a resolute coolness. Every now and then she strove to relieve herself from the iron cramp of timidity by saying something that she thought *had* intrinsic interest about her own neighbourhood and acquaintance; but, in however few words she might put these little matters of fact, she found them passed over contemptuously, as she thought, by those she spoke to; they seemed hardly to hear what she said: it was a failure, and she noticed envyingly the force of mild and intelligent silence; *hers* was too anxious or too sad to have a pleasant effect in society.

She greatly admired what here contrasted strongly with usual country manners, the total absence of fussiness, the quietness with which people got through much variety of business; there was no bustling pomp of occupation, no haste in those who carried out a multitude of little plans and large hazards daily; everything was done with easy calm; and among such soft-moving machinery, she felt like too strong a spring, that wanted

an effort to make it move, and when put in motion went too far and with too stiff a jerk.

The painful view she took of herself was not altogether mistaken; she *was* very awkward, for she was self-conscious: nervousness and bad dressing had inflicted that torment upon her for life,— but besides this, and a very pardonable ignorance of etiquette, she had contracted habits in her solitary home which stand in the way of social pleasantness. She was so used to bring her own thoughts into an axiomatic form, to reduce their results to fixed and proven principles, that she was not aware of the sententious tone it gave her when speaking to other people; and to most of them it was by no means pleasing to find this process of summing up, where they only sought the relaxation of chit-chat. Then she took everything so seriously, which was tiresome to all who dealt in graceful *badinage;* and disclaimed a compliment as earnestly as if anything was meant by it; and with all her accuracy of thought she had slipped into the common inaccuracies of expression, which people who live in a very confined circle are liable to use in the place of precise terms, both from the laziness of unready tongues, and from the quick acceptance of a slight indication of meaning among those who know each other's thoughts. Here she found herself obliged to utter clearly, and express exactly what she *did* mean, in order to be understood; and the ready-worded swiftness of world-knowing companions acted upon her diction like a file.

Sir William took a really kind interest in her because he cherished the highest esteem for her mother, still affectionately remembered,—but his manner made him seem very formidable; it so plainly betokened a demand for promptness and clearness of mind, that Constance was

sure he felt impatience and dislike when they were wanting; and certainly they were now wanting in her; so, whenever she was in his presence, she tried to be as unobtrusive and unnoticeable as she could—a natural endeavour, but a mistake, for no human being can be totally *nil* to another; and her immobility and reserve checked and disconcerted him almost as much as his quick tones silenced her. Nevertheless he, as well as Lady Eddowes, was very desirous that she should have every chance of amusement that their house afforded. One day they took her to a grand flower show: she went resolving to enjoy it, and after a fashion she did; she was happy in feeling herself unobserved, and in a place where it was difficult to commit any of her usual blunders, or rather to imagine that she committed them. Her manner was happier, though in truth the pleasantest part of the afternoon was finding its labours at an end.

"Constance Felton seemed really to enjoy *this* expedition," said Lady Eddowes to her niece as they went upstairs together. Ah, no! She enjoyed freedom from confusion, and they who do not know what such confusion is, know nothing of the joy of an escape from its secret clinging pain. But surely there is not a harder task in civilised life than the endeavour to make a nervous visitor happy. Shy of notice, yet prone to imagine neglect, an enigma to other people, and a torment to herself, such a one is often beyond reach of sympathy, while the patience expended upon her comfort is as carefully hidden as the silly odd fancies which need it.

Another day Lady Eddowes took her for a long drive: she certainly *was* unlucky in the things she noticed; in the objects at the sight of which she exclaimed with admiration. An old cottage covered with ivy at the

entrance of a village drew forth her first "How pretty!" and seeing Mrs. Herbert Forbes smile, she covered her annoyance by asking, "was that a *very* old house?" and then conscious that her remark was a silly one and deserved the silence that accidentally followed it, she tried to give it more weight by reiteration, "Is there any story attached to that picturesque old house?" Pride seeks to protect its own blunders, and often, as in this case, vainly, for her inquiry was met by Sir William crying out from the box, "Miss Felton, we have just passed one of our most beautiful views, — did you notice that bend of the river, under the wooded bank yonder? We have sketchers without end in summer time trying to do justice to it."

Her companions thought her unvarying "yes, *very* pretty," and continual smile, insipid and fatiguing. Constance thought so too; but *they* did not know that when a gentle spirit is very weary, and very unable to enjoy what is supposed to be enjoyable, the only instinct that keeps it from falling into utter languor and silence is the instinct of gratitude, with its firm resolve to *seem* pleased though pleasure is as far off as home.

Coming in tired, and weighed down with remembrance of other drives, when Basil had stopped the carriage to gather the ferns or flowers she admired, she heard Lady Eddowes say carelessly that they expected friends to dinner. To Constance it sounded a cruel mockery to mention this new ordeal in such a light, off-hand manner; particularly as she could not make any suitable addition to her evening dress, — unless she wore an antique Turkish scarf which Mrs. Felton had lent her at the last hour — as a crowning piece of elegance! — in case she should want to be particularly well dressed some day; every evening had seemed like

a dinner party to her; but good taste had kept the embroidered scarf out of sight; and even now it would not do. Dressing time was always an epoch of trepidation here, she always dreaded having to reappear in the drawing-room, and wished she had any excuse for staying upstairs; and now in the merciless sunlight of a western room, she saw how shabby her *tout ensemble* appeared,—how wan and sickly her face; and how could it be otherwise with such a sick heart within?

Her worst trial under these circumstances was that she could not apologise or explain. The cruellest part of poverty is that it must be hidden, and that it necessitates the Spartan habit of enduring anguish with a smile, lest pity lead to an oppressive beneficence. She could not now say, as her natural frankness prompted, "I know that I look a miserable object, and that you are surprised and annoyed at such a guest, but you *would* press me to come, and I cannot avoid the effects of small means and ignorance of the world's ways." She could neither say this, which would have been a relief, nor avoid the tacit insincerity arising from the imperfect knowledge that her new friends had of her home circumstances; thus Lady Eddowes *would* take it for granted that she like herself was in affluence, and ask such questions as what she wore when returning at night from balls? Her answer, "I never have been to any ball," was not enough to give a hint that she could not be likely to know who was performing in the last new opera; such subjects certainly not introduced with any notion of their giving pain to any one, made her feel how little her real disabilities were recognised. Oh, if Harriet had but remained to be her interpreter! She now watched the heavy, homewards flight of the rooks with a longing eye; wishing that she was going with them

away from this world of constraint to her old habitual seclusion; and then she took out from her desk a little pocket edition of Bacon's Essays (much endeared to her, as it came from uncle Graham), and read till the clock struck seven, and the gong sounded for dinner: she hoped thus to occupy her mind with "magnicalities" that would overcome the influence of sumptuous state below stairs, — she told herself many times that all she felt so oppressively was only the effect of wealth; that the many servants were but inferiors paid to serve rich people; the many handsomely dressed visitors only a set of human beings who had more gold than she had, and that she *was* noble in aspiration, and had the dignity of a Christian, and the security of truth. However much she believed all this it did not avail to quiet her pulse when she timidly opened the drawing-room door, and by her entrance caused a momentary hush in the soft hum of smooth voices and silky movements; perhaps her lofty meditations gave a certain rigidity to her face and attitude, as she stayed her faltering steps beside Mrs. Forbes's chair; but this rigidity prevented several young people who were standing near from venturing to open conversation with such a severe-looking person.

At that time no sentence of Lord Bacon's occurred to her mind that would at all embolden her, for "*at short distances the senses are despotic.*" *

Mrs. Herbert Forbes's two little girls were playing on the floor with a puzzle, sweetly gay in the delight of best frocks and new sashes; how Constance pined for one minute of their simple, thoughtless joy! — she who now felt an alien in a strange land; — *i. e.*, a shy, ill-dressed woman in a fashionable party.

* Emerson.

The gentleman who took her into dinner was, fortunately, a pleasant and animated talker, and to-day in a narrative style,—she had only to listen. He had been expatiating some time on the beauties of Staffa, when he asked if she had seen it?

"Never; I have hardly travelled at all."

"Then indeed you should lose *no* time in going to Staffa; you will be *well* rewarded for the trouble, and now you can get there so easily; if I might advise, I would strongly recommend you to take *that* for the object of your summer tour."

Constance had just before been thinking how she could afford a new dinner-dress to save herself from future dilemmas; *she* to travel hundreds of miles for pleasure! she smiled, and observed once more the amazing secresy with which some of the commonest deprivations must be borne.

In the course of the evening she chanced to hear a young man say to a sharp-voiced lady, on whose music-books he waited, "Oh! I wish you could hear what my friend Basil Hyde says about that; he is not a man for half-measures either."

"But he is a dreadfully clever person, is he not? I never can talk with those very superior men; they frighten me too much."

"Well," replied the other, after a moment's pause, while considering, perhaps, whether Miss Methven thought *him* obviously inferior, "well, one may feel that with some people, but not with Hyde, every one is happy with him,—you should see him with children!"

Though listening intently, Constance failed to discover what subject was referred to; Miss Methven only laughed rather affectedly as she replied, "Ah! how

pleasant it is to find that such jealous creatures as men can praise one another so charmingly: — there must be some pretty Miss Hyde, I think."

The dialogue was broken off by a request for music, and Miss Methven moved to the instrument, followed by the young barrister. He did not return to that part of the room where Constance sat, and shyness kept her where she was; but she owed to him a strange exaltation of spirits: during the rest of the evening she felt glad. This mention of Basil was a delicious sound to her; but when and where had the speaker known him?

CHAP. XLII.

"O lasso me, questo non è quel merto,
Ch'io aspettava di mia fede intera,
Questo non è quel, che me fu offerto;
Questo ne' patti nostri, Amor, non era;
Folle è colui, che in tua promessa spera,
E sotto quella vive in pianto, e in doglia."

LORENZO DE' MEDICI.

"What mochil paine
All sodainely about mine hert,
There came at onis, and how smert."—CHAUCER.

THOSE who suffer in society scan its surface with the keenest glance. Perhaps Solomon had this in his thoughts when he said, "The rich man is wise in his own conceit, but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out."

Constance found in her search much that was calculated to lower her ideas of human nature, for in general society neither man nor woman takes the most dignified position of which they are capable: she saw the best and wisest of those around her affected by the magical power of wealth,— she saw that many who resisted and renounced the vanities of the "wicked world," could not resign, and would not dispense in other people, with the badges of the fashionable world; it was but charitable to conclude that they found these two worlds diverse, or at least that there was no harm in the customs prescribed by the last. And if Christians

were more or less influenced by appearance, and a little subdued by worldly splendour, who could wonder, or who severely blame, when wearing an out-of-date dress attracted glances of surprise, and annoyed a kindly hostess?

Sir William and Lady Eddowes were high principled and good, but they wished everything about them to be in good style; and their religion was of that kind which abhors the bad taste of demonstrative emotion, and sustains spiritual worship by every appliance of outward form. Enthusiastic zeal and any sort of piety which readily combines with dissent they thought both vulgar and mischievous, and so unsettling to human minds that they would as soon have had poison in the schoolroom as any book of questionable orthodoxy. Lady Eddowes was a very charitable woman, strongly addicted to works of mercy; but she surprised Constance by her total insensibility to any benevolent scheme which she had not already honoured with a place in her list of duties; it was only less surprising than the gentle arrogance of her manner when repressing any one who tried to show her that such a scheme deserved notice; — no, she and Sir William had never approved of that sort of thing; and clearly she thought it rather presumptuous that any one else had.

But there was throughout her house a repose of perfect good taste which a little reconciled Constance to its coldness; she began to have more patience with all the little absurdities of social life; for she remarked that when a number of uncongenial minds herd together, even for a few hours, without the least expansion of real interests and individual character, they *must* have some artificial mode of communication, some words spoken only for the sake of speaking, some smiles with-

out pleasure, some laughs without amusement, some eager requests for songs or music, little cared for but for their use in filling up the vacuities of flagging conversation; she saw, and could now forgive, the little *niaiseries* of women at an evening party, their ejaculations of surprise at very slight incidents, their honeyed tones of welcome to a neighbour whose coming causes them little or no pleasure.

It seemed a pity that the true life of each should be so hidden by unmeaning or insincere habits; but she began to think there was no help for it in England, in a country full of natures so reserved and proud; still *she* could not adopt this air of lively enjoyment, though she found it to be a mask most useful, and commonly worn.

The gentleman who had spoken of Basil Hyde was come to stay a few days at Sir William Eddowes, and Constance flushed with pleasure when she heard that his name was Walter Erskine. She had only once heard that name before, but it was mentioned by Basil in reference to Elinor Lee, and consequently not forgotten.

Mr. Erskine little guessed what keen interest was felt about him by the young stranger who sat opposite to him at the breakfast table. His powerful mind would have interested any one of quick perception, though it was in great measure hidden by eccentricity, the "invisible cap" of genius. In spite of a brilliant eye, the whole cast of his features was melancholy, and there was a lassitude in his manner which gave him an air of indifference to all that went on around him.

"You must do your best for us to-day, Erskine," said Sir William, "for we are going to have a fête in Lord ——'s grounds."

"But is it necessary for me to be there?"

"Why they are going to muster a large force from several places near us, and I promised to bring as many of my party as I could. It's a glorious day, quite summer weather; you will be invaluable if you can spare time to talk æsthetics to the young ladies under the beech trees; no fear of catching cold, Frances (turning to Mrs. Herbert Forbes), there has been no rain for a fortnight. I hope you will like to come too," he continued, addressing Constance, "the grounds are well worth seeing."

"Thank you, I should like to do so very much."

She would have liked far better to be left behind alone, but still if Mr. Erskine went, there was a chance of hearing something.

It was a beautiful garden in which she was wandering among a mixed multitude between two and three o'clock. Lady Eddowes had given her in charge to Mrs. Herbert Forbes, who had seen her nurse with Bessie and Johnny at the farther end of the grounds, and had turned aside to meet them, leaving Constance with two very inarticulate young ladies who swept silkily beside her, with distant politeness, until they met a group of unexpected friends, with whom they brightened into animated conversation. As she walked behind them in silence, Constance felt indescribably forlorn. She took herself to task for such untimely depression, and busied herself in thinking why she could not enjoy the lovely scene, and why such dreary loneliness fell upon her in a party of smiling companions who all exchanged felicitations, hearty or exquisitely elaborated, on the weather, the flowers, and the views. Sometimes a blackbird sang with the same note that had told her of perfect joy in her earliest nursery days, and she longed to get quit of talkers and listen to its sweetness undisturbed; but she

could not; brightly dressed women and loud speaking men were moving about on all sides, regardless of nature, which was to *them* only an external accompaniment of more interesting things, to *her* the one great visible power that did not mortify or intimidate. Some girls near her were gay with incipient flirtations, some mothers (anxious or eager witnesses) smoothing voice and smile to a semblance of easy disregard; one or two happy sketchers, several joyous children: not one among all these could guess her painful mood, not one was able for five minutes to win her away from its gloom. Had they all been *themselves* it might have been different; for most people, if they have time to observe, can imagine the feelings of a young woman distinguished by a very plain dress, and obvious though unintentional neglect; but just then they were all the *world's*, even the most sensible, in temporary feudality to the gracious great man who was giving them all admission to his grounds, and to some the pleasure of his occasional courtesies.

If Constance could have met with a dog of tolerable sagacity she would have felt less alone, as, indeed, she did when a little boy who had fallen on the gravel (an orphan and poor, so there was no maternal or public fuss over his scratches), slipped his hand into hers and asked if he might walk with her. Neither dog nor child would have felt, "How very extraordinary," or said, "What an odd notion" to any remark she might hazard; an expression which she fancied rose to the lips of every one she spoke to away from home or Burnham.

Now she *was* so far extraordinary that she was ignorant of the world and morbidly sensitive, and to-day it happened that her associates were devoted to what is

ordinary, being themselves for the most part of common mould, which we know is not of the finest. She saw enough of the gay world in the glimpses this day's experience afforded to justify, in some degree, the sweeping condemnation of its ways, which she had so often attributed to narrowness of mind among the Pod mores; and if she had not seen the bad effects of entirely excluding worldly influence, she might now have been tempted to apply their sharp-dividing line, and think her own awkwardness a more blessed possession than the *savoir faire* she wanted; for now she was pained to the quick by this subtle agent, *worldliness*, which, besides making people feel all the value of that which they are *without*, deprives those who are sensitive of the use of whatever intrinsic advantage they have.

Constance did not know that the odd simplicity of her unworldly habits puzzled and distanced those with whom she was now living, and often made them, by antagonism, more vivacious about their frivolities than they naturally were.

After the pic-nic dinner, which was only longer about and more sumptuous than on regular occasions, she slipped away with two or three children, who were delighted to find a good-natured, grown-up lady who did not know where the obelisk stood, or which path led to the fernery; and when they had shown her these, promised to tell of some new discovery if she would wait in the Italian garden till they returned. Constance begged them not to hurry back, she liked being alone, but just as she was giving herself up to the luxury of reverie, they returned with Mr. Erskine, another solitary-minded person, whom their eager prattle had amused.

"You have chosen a good place for enjoyment," he

said, looking at the glowing flower-beds round her; "I hope we do not interrupt it; these urchins dragged me here?"

Constance had been wishing that she might meet him all the day, and gladly strolled about with him and her little friends. After a few common-place remarks, she took courage to say, "I think I heard you speaking yesterday of the relation of a great friend of mine, Miss Hyde of Burnham, near Dorking; do you chance to know her?" She spoke with perfect ease of manner now, for she was too habitually self-controlled to betray the deep agitation of the *heart*.

"Miss Hyde! to be sure, my friend Basil Hyde's aunt. Do you know them: charming people, are they not?"

"Very pleasant, indeed."

"I suppose you know they are in town? I met them last week at General Lee's; you have met the general, I daresay, at Burnham?"

"Miss Lee, but not her father, was staying there during my only visit; *how* lovely she is. I hope she is stronger than she was," Constance continued after a slight pause, while Mr. Erskine walked on more hastily, snapping off the little twigs his hand could reach in passing by the shrubs.

"Better, much better, thank you. Can I give Miss Hyde any message for you? I shall probably be in town to-morrow, and I mean to call if I have time."

"Oh! if you do see her, pray give her my love and say—tell her I am here."

"A straightforward message, certainly. I shall easily remember that. Have you heard the rumour about Hyde's engagement? I don't put much faith in it myself; but some one told me that a Miss Cartaret had

secured his affections. Have you ever seen her at their house?"

"No, never: *engaged* did you say?"

"That was the *on dit;* but I fancy I should have been told by this time if there was any truth in it, so pray make no allusion to what I have said. I would not breathe a word of it to Hyde myself, until he told me; you know how excessively touchy he can be. Those children tire you by dragging you on too fast; will you not rest on this bench?"

"Thank you, I had rather go on; Lady Eddowes will be wondering where I am. How sultry the air is; these hot days of spring are very exhausting I think."

CHAP. XLIII.

"Where is the love that thou wouldst find?
Absence, my friend, works wonders oft;
Now brings full low that lay full loft;
Now turns the mind—now to, now fro—
And where art thou if it were so?"—LORD SURREY.

"Sorrow and pain, as well as hope and love,
Stretch out of view into the heavens above."
W. ALLINGHAM.

IT was two days after this that Constance was sitting with Harriet in an upper room in Portland Place, talking to her earnestly while she put on her bonnet and shawl for morning service. Lady Eddowes had brought her guest to town the day before, and after taking her to see two exhibitions of pictures, had left her, according to previous arrangement, at Mr. Lycett's house, to spend Sunday with her cousin; promising another day of sight-seeing when she came to fetch her back.

It was very kindly arranged that the country visitor should thus take advantage of her nearness to London, and she felt the kindness, though not much of the pleasure that was intended. Her heart was too tired for any pleasure, too faint for any hope, except the feverish, unreasonable hope of seeing Basil at every turn of the street, among every crowd of strange faces. He was in London, surely they might chance to meet—possibly—oh! it was only *just* possible. Mr. Erskine,

who had heard where she was going to spend Sunday, might tell Mr. Hyde, and then he *might* call to-day. But this absurd notion was not communicated to Harriet, who had listened to what Constance had told her of Mr. Erskine's report with a grave face, while turning to the looking-glass, she gently pulled forward the flowers of her bonnet-cap, and gave her shawl the last decisive fold.

"And do tell me, Harriet, *now*, for we may not have another quiet moment together,—is it not quite *certain* that *he* must have forgotten, or there would not have been the rumour even about that Miss Cartaret? Don't say what you think pleasant to me, but what you really do think."

"Well, I confess there *is* too much truth in what you say, dear Conny, but still — men do often flirt all the more from being put out with some one else whom they really love; — give me those boots by you, please — the thing is you *must* see him, and judge for yourself, — tell Miss Hyde you are at Richmond, and can spare her a few days."

"Oh, never! no I *could* not. I feel as if it would half kill me to meet him if he *is* so changed."

"But it might make all the difference if he saw that your feelings were unchanged, — hark! one of the children is calling me; dear me! it's time we were off, do put on your gloves and make haste down. Mr. Lycett is very particular about punctuality."

In church, among all the hundreds that stood up to sing in sight of Constance there was a gentleman about five pews in front of her, whose hair was curly and of a rich chestnut colour, — whose height and shape of shoulders reminded her wandering eye of Mr. Hyde's. Could it be he? Easily—though the Lees lived in Eaton

Square, yet people often came from a distance to hear the eloquent preacher at All Souls in Langham Place,—if the head would but turn!

Poor Constance, who needed Divine pity and succour more than she? and yet, while imploring it during the Litany, her heart was fluttering at the supposed presence of a human being; and as she made her responses in a broken whisper, she fancied she heard the unmistakable tones of *his*, and from that moment spoke, and knelt, and rose up as if she was under his eye, — the eye of God almost forgotten in the strong excitement of passion. During the sermon, when a bonnet now and then bent down and allowed her to see again those chestnut curls, she told herself how she would behave on meeting him after church, and how Harriet would fall back with the children to allow her time to walk a few paces beside him, and then she would ask — a child roared in a gallery behind her, and the head turned round to see what was the matter; a cadaverous-looking face with a flattened nose and strong squint met her view. When the preacher spoke of peace in his final blessing, she felt as if it would indeed pass her present understanding.

While the children were dining at the luncheon-table, Harriet superintended in stout and rosy self-importance, and with surprising authority as it appeared to her cousin: she was amused to notice the monitorial tone used even to their father at times. "I cannot recommend this cake to you, Mr. Lycett; it is far too rich; you had better have some of this bread-pudding I should think."

Whether the master of the house liked or disliked such attentions Constance could not detect; but she did observe that little things which would have pained her as slights, only struck Harriet as deficiencies in the politeness of those who tried to inflict them; — her

habit of blaming other people for anything that was displeasing saved her from dejection and self-distrust as surely as the tendency always to blame herself made Constance timid and sad.

The governess was engaged with her pupils the whole afternoon, walking and reading with them, and as they were going to church in the evening, Constance was alone till dinner-time; she took a volume of sermons to the open window, selected one upon patience under trial, and began to read it, but as no one came into the drawing-room, she soon closed the book, and yielded to melancholy musing: — once the knocker of the hall-door startled her from it, and the sound of gentlemen's feet running up the stairs, coloured her cheeks for a moment, but they went into the library, and soon came out again, and left the house together with Mr. Lycett; and then except an occasional carriage, or a passing step, all sounds were hushed, until bells began to chime again. Constance looked out; it was a beautiful afternoon; "a clear shining after rain" fell upon numbers of passengers; a bishop was to preach a charity sermon in an adjacent church, and the pavement was thronged.

What happy faces! What groups of friends going by together! Accustomed from a child to interest herself in the faces of strangers, she first noticed a family party, — the old mother, as she concluded her to be, leaning on a gentleman's arm, and his frequent look back to the joyous wife behind, who led on the youngest boy; — followed by three girls and a tall youth; she fancied their happy return home, their merry tea-table talk — but just then a pair came in sight, an evident bride she thought, — perhaps it was her first Sunday after the wedding tour, — she looked so sweetly happy, and her companion so fondly proud.

In all who followed Constance thought she saw traces of happiness, — content — or at least, temporary satisfaction—(it was a fashionable congregation she watched) and though she told herself that they might have secret or recognised sorrow quite equal to her own, yet the evidence of sight made her believe them all to be happier than herself; and she sighed heavily, thinking, "Is there *no* happiness for me? am *I* to be miserable while so many are so unspeakably happy? If the Father of Spirits delights in showing mercy, and pouring out His blessings, why not bless me with a little joy? — a little of what my fellow-creatures share so largely!"

She checked the murmuring impulse then, but it was only conquered by prayer; and the next morning when taking leave of Harriet, she was able to say with unfeigned submission, "No; do not advise me to do anything now, but bear the grief patiently, indeed, indeed, it is *all* over. I have quite done with hoping — good-bye, dear Harriet, and thank you. Lady Eddowes waits for me at the Polytechnic, so I must not keep the carriage waiting — good-bye," and again she ran back to add, "I have been selfishly occupied with my own trouble, but I am truly glad to see you so happily settled here. Good-bye."

Mr. and Mrs. Felton heard of the amusements Lady Eddowes had procured for Constance, and were pleased and grateful; they had a letter from Sir William, in which she was spoken of in kindly flattering terms, and they felt a little proud.

"How gay Conny seems, and how much they are making of her," said Mrs. Felton, laying down the letter. "I hope she will not be spoiled."

At that time the most likely thing was that she

would be crushed with disappointment and humiliation. Much kindness, and even affection, was now bestowed on her at Richmond, and had she been happy in herself, it would have raised her spirits. Poor heart! with hers it fared as ill as with the flower that, put hastily among others in a glass of water, is *near* to water, and, not reaching it, withers unrefreshed and unheeded beneath those that freely enjoy it. Amidst praise and caresses she moved, confounded and abased by what *she* felt immeasurable inferiority to other people in all but mind; now even her powers of mind seemed thrown into suspicion, and she felt only a shy and puzzled creature, thrust into society for which she was unfitted, and borne with compassionately by wondering spectators. If any sign of such an idea escaped her, it was thought an extreme form of mock modesty, but it was as true as the dejection of Walter Erskine, whom she saw day after day receiving his proof-sheets: she envied his proud joys, for they were the proofs of a second edition of an admirable work that the sale of a few weeks had exhausted; but he felt no pride and little joy. Elinor Lee, for whose praise his heart had throbbed, looked on his pages with a cold eye, and only said, "The subject is not very new, is it?" and the world had now no praise to offer which he much cared for. She did not know what pain her assumed indifference *could* give, or she would have suffered her gentle heart to speak, and for once might have forgotten her prudence.

Mr. Erskine *had* told the Hydes that Constance was staying at Richmond, but the information did not affect Basil's movements, and he returned to Burnham a week sooner than his aunt, as he had before determined to do. Miss Hyde took the first opportunity of going to

see her young friend, on the Tuesday after her day in London, and happily found her within. The delight of seeing Miss Hyde again, of hearing her soft-toned voice, and meeting her tenderly expressive eye, gave animation and brightness to Constance; and it was no wonder that Miss Hyde complimented her on her looking so well,—"So well, my dear, that I have no remaining scruple about the plan I came to propose. I want you to come home with me, if it is but for a day or two, and I am sorry to say we have promised ourselves to friends in Norfolk for the week after next. Now when do you leave this place?"

"This day week, I believe."

"Say Monday, rather, and then you can come down to Burnham with me; don't you think you could?

"Oh! thank you, but I told them at home that I would certainly return ——"

"But I think neither your father nor Mrs. Felton could refuse my having you for just that short time,—only till the following Saturday, for, as I tell you, we must start on our journey next Monday week. I am sure you may come; but write at once to ask, and let me know, as soon as you can, if I may expect you to take your place in my carriage, like a good girl."

Her pulse beat fast as she answered, "Yes, I will—thank you for wishing me to come."

"Why, a call like this is nothing. We have so much to tell you about; Basil and I have been great travellers since I saw you last."

"Yes, — he is well, I hope, — and Shag?"

"Quite well, thank you; at least he was so when he left me last week: — he went home to keep Shag company," she added, sighing under a faint smile.

When she was gone, Constance compared her friend's

looks with her words, and came to the conclusion that she was either not well or not happy. There was an expression of anxiety on her face that used not to be there. What could it be about?—Miss Cartaret? and if it was, why should *she* go to Burnham? why subject herself to slow torture? But she had almost promised to go; and besides, the saddest certainty is better than protracted doubt.

CHAP. XLIV.

"Against that time when thou shalt strangely pass,
And scarcely greet me with that sun thine eye;
When love, converted from the thing it was,
Shall reasons find of settled gravity.

. . . . . .

Thou canst not, love, disgrace me half so ill,
To set a form upon desired change,
As I'll myself disgrace: knowing thy will,
I will acquaintance strangle, and look strange."

SHAKSPEARE'S *Sonnets.*

THERE is perhaps nothing that makes a person more formidable than an extinct love. The one who was once the object of affection not only feels the loss of that, but fears the cruel reaction of a heart that tries to justify its change by accusing itself of extravagant admiration in time past, in order to avoid self-accusation for the present coldness of caprice. As Constance journeyed to Burnham with Miss Hyde, she feared Basil almost as much as she longed to see him once more. Other women might have strengthened their hearts with pride; the true dignity of modesty and the patience of a Christian faith were the only support of hers; and had it been possible she would fain have said to him, as simply as she said to herself, "I was not worth your love, yet you gave me enough of it to make me love you; and now you find it was a mistake, I would not for worlds seek to recover what is *lost.* Only

let us be friends; be kind to me, *only believe* me a true friend."

Evening sunlight was glorifying every leaf and blossom as she drove up to his home; the brilliant glow looked like visible happiness, and smote her heart with a cruel sense of contrast; and Basil did not even come to the hall-door to meet them: the servant said he had gone out to dinner, and left word that he should not return till the following afternoon; when Miss Hyde questioned him further, he said that young Mr. Cartaret had driven over that morning, and master had gone off with him.

The quiet, meaningless greeting which Constance had prepared in her own mind was not needed then; and during the evening she found her energies fully tasked by conversation with Miss Hyde, who professed fatigue, and was obviously out of spirits. But no mention was made of the Cartarets.

When her nephew walked in a little before dressing-time the next day, there was something of stiffness in her welcome, and a touch of reproach in her accent as she said, "I suppose you thought you might take the liberty of an old friend with Constance, but many ladies would have thought your conduct very rude." He had shaken hands with Constance as if they had only parted a week before; asked ceremoniously after Mr. and Mrs. Felton, with his eye on her work and not on her face; and now answered, with some degree of *nonchalance*, "Really I could not be so vain as to suppose my absence any loss to Miss Felton; I'm sorry it happened. It was quite accidental;—Cartaret had got a party of friends for rook-shooting, and wanted me over there. I hope you left the General well, and Nelly?" As the conversation soon took a direction which she could not

follow, Constance had opportunity for looking on the face she loved; — it *was* noble: it was no delusion to think him a grander creature than other men; she *could* not blame herself for loving such a one; she could not wish his image effaced from her mind, or regret the peace it had cost her,—but there was a change in his appearance now; the melancholy that used to dream there was gone, and a restless look had taken its place. He seemed harassed, and grave without any apparent reason, and his manner towards Miss Hyde alternated between pettishness and uncalled-for compliance: he seemed trying to propitiate her, and yet to be secretly irritated by the effort.

At dinner-time Constance exerted herself to talk with cheerful calmness, but found Basil less conversible than he used to be,—elaborately polite to her, and studiously attentive when she spoke to him, but absent in manner between whiles. Perhaps she was unfortunate in the topics she led up to; of his summer travels he seemed averse to talk, and looked unmistakably bored whenever his aunt said, "Tell Constance about your adventure on the Splugen, Basil;" or to her, "You must get Basil to tell you what we did in our three days' sojourn at Geneva; it almost tires me now to remember how he dragged me hither and thither."

"And me *quite*," muttered her nephew; "Miss Felton can find it much better described by fifty publishing tourists."

"Yes," replied Constance, "but not what *you* did there;" and then, seeing him feign a slight yawn, she gently turned the subject by inquiring if they saw any of the schools in Geneva.

A little less than a year before, Basil had been very eager about industrial schools, and had talked often and

earnestly to her about them. With her an interest once fully awakened seldom died out; with him it was soon as wearisome as it had once been exciting: and now, when she confidently appealed to him for information about an industrial school he had himself taken some pains to establish, she was surprised as well as pained by his air of unconcerned ignorance.

"I believe it works well," he replied; "I have no reason to doubt that it does; the schoolmistress we appointed had a very high character. If you wish to know more about it, I shall be very happy to drive you over there one day this week."

"Thank you. I am afraid a sight of it would only make me envious. In our little parish there are not funds sufficient for such a school; we are still content with an old-fashioned national school — I fancy our rector prefers it to any other."

Basil was touched by her sweetness of temper towards him, and though he had persuaded himself that *he* was the aggrieved person whom she had slighted, or at least consented to repulse,—though he cherished his resentment as a legitimate reason for change, he could not at that moment resist an older spell; his eye dwelt on her downcast face almost regretfully, and when the ladies rose to leave the dining-room, he followed her to the window, and pointing towards two tiny chestnuts on one side of the garden-walk, he said, "Look at our seedlings, Miss Felton."

"Are those what we planted that still November evening? How flourishing they look! Oh! *how* long ago that seems!"

But the sunbeams, that turned the laburnums close by to a brighter gold, dazzled his eyes: he covered them with his hand, and was silent; and noiselessly she

slipped out of the room. The bright sunset was followed by heavy showers, so that there was no walking before tea. Basil came in while it was being poured out, frowning and taciturn; and he did not sit down near Constance to-day.

When the tea was removed, Miss Hyde told her, with courteous apology, that she was obliged to leave her for half an hour: it was the evening when her village singing-class came to practise with her, and she did not like to send them away this week, because they had already been put off several times. A few minutes later the children were announced, and she withdrew. Constance sat as in a dream. Basil was pretending to read opposite to her, and she was trying to work; but her heart throbbed so heavily that she leaned forward on the table for support, and felt as if the delicate lilies in the flower-glass near her must have trembled at every pulsation. She asked herself the poet's question, and answered like him,—

> "Was it not well to speak,
> To have spoken once? It could not but be well." *

But the circumstances were very unlike, and the separation of which he spoke had not the cold anguish of theirs. Basil was wretched, but he had gone too far in a contrary direction for him to retrieve his loss; honour forbade it. She longed to explain the bitter disappointment—as it had been to her—of their last day together, but delicacy forbade that too: woman's instinct told her that any reference to a state of feeling which *he* had outlived would give him fruitless pain, and this had kept her from almost every allusion to the

* Tennyson's "Love and Duty."

happy days of the past. Now, however, as she sat with him alone, and felt that her hope — her slowly declining hope — was at the point of death, she grew bold with despair, and spoke as plainly as a dying person might.

"I have looked forward to seeing you again *so* long!" was the whole of that heart-broken revelation, and in it she felt as if she had told him everything. Was his heart deaf to her tone? He only answered with civilly proportioned earnestness, "Yes, indeed it *is* a long time since we met;" and then, though he had laid down his book, neither of them spoke; her hands were again busy with the needle, and he trifled with a pencil upon some visiting cards that lay beside him. In truth they had not wholly met then; only in part, for his thoughts were escaping elsewhere. Just then *God save the Queen* rose up in the adjoining room, from many little throats at full stretch.

"Not very artistic singing that," said Basil, hardly looking up.

"I like to hear it," she replied. But oh! what sort of liking was that! A rush of old memories crowded upon her at those oft-heard sounds; and the heart—though palsied with sorrow, *could* not dismiss the phantoms they called up of merry meetings ended with that song, while the dew fell and the last wakeful bird trilled softly near the singers,—of bands playing at the door on glittering frosty nights at Christmas,—of quiet home evenings when the silent enthusiasm of her father was roused by that tune to a cordial accompaniment of humming. And when psalms and hymns followed, and still more sacred associations were awakened, *could* the wounded spirit bear its conflict of feeling without a sign? No sign, but intense suffering,— no movement of the lip, but a force put upon every nerve which will

leave its mark as long as life shall last. And Basil was close by and unheeding! These are the sorrows that make people age visibly. Constance remained silent some minutes after the singing had ceased, but, with Miss Hyde, Shag trotted into the room, and in passing by jumped up and licked her hand. "What constant memories dogs have!" she murmured.

"They cannot be much happier for them, I should think," retorted Basil, "for nothing else is constant that I ever met with, except disappointment."

Hardly hearing a word he said at her end of the room, Miss Hyde came up and asked them what they thought of her pupils' voices.

"Very fair, dear aunt; they do you great credit,—only why do you let them drawl over the psalm tunes so mournfully?"

"My dear, *I* think serious things *should* be treated seriously; do not you, Constance?"

"But what *has* plaintiveness to do with piety? and why should people drawl in singing praises, and whimper over their prayers? I never could understand why, if the Gospel is good tidings, poor old Podmore should have quavered his voice in reading it in the lamentable way he did,—it used to make me feel impious."

Constance did not smile; her eyes no longer sought out his, they were fastened on the white bells of the lilies. At any crisis of passionate feeling we view inanimate trifles with peculiar attention: their insensibility to all we bear in their presence seems almost strange, and yet we are apt to look towards them as witnesses of what no human eye has seen, and to feel them a kind of guarantee that life's calm waves are not all to be sucked into the whirlpool of emotion in which the weak heart eddies,—that the peace we have lost *still is*, and may

yet be regained. Constance could not recover hers that night; not only broken down with sorrow, but writhing with "penetrative shame," she lay in sleepless agitation, self-condemned, self-pitied, and now hardly self-controlled. *Now* pride stung her; now she felt how foolishly she had betrayed a tenderness no longer desired, a love no longer sought: would he not henceforth despise her? Could he ever forget those few low words that told her secret when it was utterly worthless to him, and only humiliating to her? He remembered them indeed, but not as a disgrace to *her;* he remembered them only too well, as we do many things which conscience commands us to forget.

CHAP. XLV.

"I see that clean out of your mind
Ye have me cast, and I ne can nor may
For all this world within mine herté find
To unloven you a quarter of a day."—CHAUCER.

"I have no wrong, where I can claim no right,
Naught ta'en me fro, where I have nothing had;
Yet of my woe I cannot so be quite."
SIR THOMAS WYATT.

BEFORE they had left the breakfast-table the next morning, a messenger arrived from the Cartarets, and a small basket and two notes were brought in. Basil appeared to read his with pleasure; Miss Hyde showed annoyance as soon as she opened hers. "Really," she said, "this is a most inconsiderate request,—to ask us all to dine there the day after to-morrow,—impossible! it is my last evening with Constance."

"Poor Miss Cartaret could not possibly have known *that*, aunt; and I think myself that it would be extremely uncivil to refuse, when they have got up a party expressly for us—while Miss Felton is our guest,—I do not see how you can get out of it."

"Oh, my dear Basil, you used not to be so *very* polite when you disliked dining out, you always had a good reason for declining. I think you have learned some degree of servitude to etiquette from these very sociable neighbours."

"Learned!" cried he, firing up; "women and weak people always suppose one gets every opinion and feeling second-hand. I did not want any one to *teach* me to be civil when it would be unkind to be otherwise; but I know you have such a prejudice in that quarter that we can never see any procedure of theirs from the same point of view. If any one *else* in the neighbourhood had made an effort to invite us to his house, as soon as he was well enough to leave his room, you would have lectured me half an hour on the *duty* of going." He had raised his voice angrily, and this never failed to subdue Miss Hyde's courage.

"Well, dear Basil, you may be right; only we must really let Constance decide whether *she* wishes to go, for I am sure you could make our excuses."

"Oh! do not let me be any hindrance; I shall gladly accompany you," said Constance, who felt a sad pleasure in forwarding anything he wished.

"But then we are forgetting Mr. Erskine; he comes, you know, to-morrow," Miss Hyde interposed; for she was resolved to escape if a valid excuse could be found.

"Just the man we want," replied Basil; "Miss Cartaret says they are short of gentlemen."

"Oh! YOU hear from her too, then. I concluded your note was from her father or brother."

"No,— she kindly wrote to offer these fossils for my collection;— look here, what a fine one this is! Are you interested in such things, Miss Felton?"

Ah poor Constance! as she glanced shyly at the elegantly packed little basketful, and the note-sheet of dashing handwriting that lay beside it, she thought of a *trilobite* that she had given many shillings for in the last autumn, because she had once heard Basil express a wish for a perfect specimen; which she had feared to

send or to mention even to his aunt, from a dislike to showing *any* forwardness to please him, — which still lay treasured up in her dressing-case, because, after that hour alone with him, she felt it impossible to say or do what could be construed into an effort to win back his affection.

Miss Cartaret had no such scruples; and if Constance had seen her note, its flattering phraseology would have startled her womanly pride, and she would have wondered how a man of delicate perception in all other matters could be blinded by incense so evidently offered to his self-love. But it was a subtle and powerful incense, and worked wonders in the capricious and time-wearied man.

"Have you read that novel?" he said to Constance in the evening, pointing to one of the most trashy productions of an undisciplined pen.

"No, indeed; I fancied it would be rather a tiresome waste of time to do so."

"Ah! *your* time very likely," he replied, and, taking up the identical book, absorbed himself in its contents a good hour. It was not till the following day, when she was alone in the drawing-room, that she could discover the cause of his piqued manner while so doing. *Anne Cartaret* was the name inscribed on the title-page. Basil had still too much interest in Constance not to resent a difference of opinion between them, and a short time afterwards she heard him say to his aunt, —

"Miss Felton never enjoys a book that can be read easily; it's no use lending her that simple little story; she finds anything she can understand miserably shallow."

His tone was like a stab to her heart, but she tried to smile good-humouredly, and said, —

"Yet I read Bancroft's History of the United States, which you told me I should find so delightfully clear."

"All through?"

"Yes; you told me to do so."

She spoke as her nature prompted, like a humble child; and he, though his manner softened, dared not reveal what *then his* nature would have expressed. He dared not return even to the terms of common friendliness, and, like many a man unused to dissemble, was almost rude for fear of being affectionate; he was glad she could not stay long, and had asked Walter Erskine to visit him that week, for the express purpose of adding a new element to the once sufficient trio.

The day on which Constance was to see Miss Cartaret passed heavily with her;—a lovely day! The lawns were being mown, and summer flowers opened; she could *enjoy* nothing, but her perceptions were not the less keen; through all her misery she felt the fresh sweetness of the lilacs coming to her from the garden; she saw the dawning glory of June roses, beginning to flush on every side; she heard the soft whisper of a grove of aspens by her bedroom window, and wondered why there was to be no joy for her, at a time of such profuse largess. The framework of her present life was fit for exquisite pleasures, and it was laden with poignant griefs; but notwithstanding this contrast, and the sad rebellious thoughts it awakened, there *was* a softening influence from such surroundings,—a pathetic sweetness, like that of looking at the averted face of a friend who once treated us tenderly. She remembered the bliss nature had given her;—fate was too cruel to allow anything of bliss *now*, but still she was in the presence of nature.

The clouds of a thundery sky were shifting through still phases of fire and crimson and copper colour, while she prepared for the dreaded dinner party; while she

thought, "Of course Miss Cartaret is beautiful," and pulled off a pair of white gloves that split on being hastily put on; but when the sky darkened, and every fleecy fragment in the west was turning grey, she suddenly lost all her mournful curiosity to see her, and longed to stay behind in the mute and dewy twilight. The carriage was not yet come to the door, and she began to talk with Mr. Erskine, in a sustained tone of artificial interest, till Basil came and dropped into a chair beside her, when she said, "Have you noticed the clouds this evening? they have been beautiful enough for the dress of angels."

"Ah!" he replied, "if they find flame-colour becoming."

Anne Cartaret would have laughed loudly at the rejoinder — it was quite in her vein. In half an hour Constance heard her noisy laugh, and could watch her striking figure. It was tall and lithe, and as graceful as assurance and stylishness of dress would permit; but her face had no beauty; strong dark eyes, very advancing teeth, and constant vivacity of expression were its main characteristics. She thanked Miss Hyde for coming on such short notice, with loud emphasis; shook hands familiarly with Constance on being introduced, and secured Basil for her left-hand neighbour at dinner, though, as mistress of the house, an older guest took her in.

"Anne Cartaret was frivolous, but she had had so many disadvantages." Constance recalled these words of Basil's, uttered many months ago, and learned now that when once a strong inclination is taken under the shelter of a generous principle, self-pleasing will go on unhindered by every other dictate of reason.

Anne Cartaret's disadvantages, as the motherless child

of a vulgar-minded man, appealed to Basil's pity and benevolence, while her manifest admiration of him flattered his sensitive pride. Nothing would have surprised him more than to have been told, that there was at least as much vanity as good-nature in his resolve to save her from her fate as a flirt, by making her his wife; yet Constance suspected it now, and knew it afterwards.

It may be that the many novels she read in which the love of the lady had been misunderstood to her own and her lover's ruin, had given Miss Cartaret too much alarm lest *any* feeling of hers should be doubted; certainly she spared no pains to make it legible in her manner with regard to Basil Hyde, and Constance saw with surprise that he found it pleasant reading.

He was desperately witty at dinner, and Miss Cartaret violently amused; but that seemed all, and her manner was so unpleasing to Constance, that she dismissed the notion of his being really in love with such a woman as preposterous. He was talking nearly all the evening to her, but there was no evidence in his face of "the angelic gravity of love;"* and people so much more commonly laugh because they are expected to do so, than because there is anything to laugh at, that there was no telling from the merriment of the group of listeners whether Miss Cartaret was *really* amusing. Constance rather thought not, and certainly she did not envy her the compliments she overheard now and then; they sounded so little like the respectfulness of love; they seemed to come only from his lips; and his over-praise of her rattling execution on the piano struck her as the disguise of non-enjoyment.

* William Allingham.

She was herself worried into singing by Miss Cartaret, who got Basil to second her entreaty; and with a strong effort she accompanied a simple Russian air with words that he had formerly admired and begged her to copy for him.

"I think you used to like this," she said faintly, as she took her place at the instrument.

"Oh! look not back, lest memories awaken,
Mournful and deep as that low sigh!
Peace may return when hope hath long forsaken;
Hearts may be calmed, and cruel sorrows die.

"Oh! leave the past, lest thou, in dreams returning
Over thy path in that dim land,
Find there the oft-quenched fires faintly burning,—
Streams painted bright on barren, desert sand.

"Oh! look not back, for how should soft forgetting
Creep on the soul lamenting still?
What in lost hours was worth thy keen regretting?
False, blinding hopes? or love that time could chill?

"Time teaches well, our worthless treasures stealing,
Loosening the chain of bygone years;
Hearts sorely grieved have felt its gentle healing,
Slowly, alas! it seals the fount of tears."

She got through the song with difficulty, and he did not move or speak when it was finished, leaning, with his forehead resting on his hand, on the back of a chair behind her; but his silence, which pleased her better than any spoken thanks, was covered by Miss Cartaret's shrill eulogium.

"Oh! that is sweetly pretty indeed, is it *not*, Mr. Hyde?—charming, and sung with *such* taste."

The taste as well as the heart of the singer had been on the rack all the evening, and she was glad that Miss

Hyde remained at the other end of the room till it was time to go.

"How melancholy Constance looked!" said Miss Hyde on their return home, when she had wished them good night.

"Wretched as a white cow in a snow storm," said Basil with a bitter laugh; adding, in an under-tone, "or a Christmas rose in a black frost."

He had been eager to get Constance to dine at the Cartarets' that day, not only to gratify a determined wish of Anne's, but in the hope of hearing what opinion was formed of her by one whose candour and penetration he could not doubt; and when, on their way back, he had gaily asked what Miss Felton thought of Miss Cartaret, and been told "not anything very different from what I first heard you say about her," his mortification was extreme; and he could not see by starlight the tender, deprecating smile which would have shown him that no taunt or reprisal was intended by those few, inevitable words.

He left his aunt and went to the smoking-room, as he called his study, when Walter Erskine was with them, and threw himself upon the sofa with a sigh, which he opened into a yawn when he found his friend's eye intent upon his movements, and said, "I'm tired to death to-night; are not you?"

"Miss Cartaret is not wanting in high spirits," replied Walter Erskine, very abruptly, addressing Basil's thought more than his words.

"Not if laughing proves them."

"You think it proves good teeth, perhaps, more certainly—eh?"

Basil kicked off a sofa-cushion and answered, "I have no taste for a kill-joy; maybe no *very* sensible

woman would ever laugh so incessantly, but what bores your very sensible women are! moralising, and arguing, and wishing for one's opinion, to quote to some one else with a commentary, ten to one!"

Walter threw the rest of his cigar into the grate with a contemptuous "Pshaw! how long have *you* thought so?"

And with flushed face and angry voice Basil reiterated this and many other foolish things to the disparagement of good-sense and the praise of folly; ending with a vehement assertion that he had *always* said there would be less plague in marrying a downright idiot, than "a superior woman."

He overdid his point, because he was trying to talk down his real convictions: if he wished to compliment Miss Cartaret upon her shallowness of mind, he would have paid a far higher tribute to her charms by allowing the fair worth of talents which she did *not* possess, and *yet* showing his preference to her who had them not, than by running down other excellences in order to exalt hers. And in so rudely estimating the superiority he once admired, he wronged his own past love. Men often do this, and sometimes women. Long separation necessarily diminishes the strength of love, unless imagination intensifies it; there is nothing to feed it with but the impressions of a past time, and these naturally fade, or are overlaid by those of present and newer objects; besides, the whole course of experience is so full of proofs that we have made mistakes; there is so much of failure, and disappointment, and falling off, that we unconsciously measure our past affections —our once warm admiration—by the contracted hopes of the present, and think, "It was an illusion that made me love and admire as I used—such a character would appear common-place now," and so it does, perhaps, until we meet it in real life again.

CHAP. XLVI.

"My love a kind of dream was grown,
A foolish, but a pleasant one!
From which I'm wakened now; but oh,
Prisoners to die are wakened so!"—COWLEY.

"Doch ein Anblick tiefrer Trauer,
Bänger als des sterben's Schauer,
Wär es, könnt' ein Aug' es fassen,
Wie zwei Herzen sich verlassen!"—LENAU.

CONSTANCE need not have left Burnham on the Saturday, a put-off from the friends in Norfolk having reached the Hydes in time for her to change her plans also, and both Basil and his aunt having pressed her to stay another week if she possibly could; but she declined, pleading that this visit had been altogether beyond the original term of her leave of absence. In reality she was exhausted with the force she put upon herself to hide what she felt, and now dreaded every additional hour at this place as much as once she would have prized it; and yet, though dreading the ordeal, she was aware that Basil's presence had still a terrible charm, and that it was now her duty to break from it: if she lingered, if she continued to study his face, his manner, and his character, for an explanation of the cruel spell he exercised, she would only confirm its power. In his conversation with another very clever man, she found new proofs of his brilliant and various endowments; and

in his behaviour towards Miss Hyde there was now that mixture of waywardness, tenderness, and compunction, which shows how much a generous nature suffers when it foresees the necessity of inflicting pain.

It *had* become a necessity, for he had already pledged himself to Miss Cartaret by implied, if not by expressed intentions, and *she* was not a woman to allow any *contretemps*, or any caprice, to come between her and their fulfilment. Already she exerted over him an irksome influence, and exacted little attentions with a strength of volition that her blandishments hardly concealed, as on this occasion, when she had beguiled him into a promise that he would come over the first thing the next morning to see and try a new horse which her father was about to purchase for her use; he had begun to excuse himself because Miss Felton would be just leaving, but her name, and a bright cold eye, made him feel cowardly, and at last he was teased into consent; besides, as Anne Cartaret said, "ladies always had so many last words to say to each other, that gentlemen were better out of their way."

It was an awkward moment, however, when, at the early breakfast, he tried to explain his reason for riding off to the Cartarets', as soon as it was over.

"I shall try and be at the station to see you off, Miss Felton; your train goes at eleven, I think."

"Pray do not embarrass yourself on my account," said Constance with syllabic steadiness, believing that her voice sounded quite natural; "I dare say you will find your business take more time than you expect."

A slightly caustic stress on the word "business" struck his ear, and jerking back the proud head, he exclaimed, "It doesn't take me long to judge of a horse, but it would be foolish to think myself essential to your com-

fort, even at a railway station; I shall hope, however, to have the pleasure of attending you. I must turn Shag out of the room; he is plaguing you."

Poor Shag was only giving her an excuse for turning a trembling face away from his master, and letting a tear fall which only the dog should see.

"What an idle fellow Erskine is!" Basil went on, conscious of his aunt's silent annoyance, and partly perceiving the pain he had given Constance; "I must give him a call under his window, so I will say good-bye for the present, Miss Felton," and rising from table he shook hands with her, and said, "Good-bye, if I do not see you again."

It was a good-bye for a longer separation than either of them then expected. He left the room, and she would have found it difficult to cover the immense blank in her heart, had not Miss Hyde at once broke out, "Was there ever a man so bewitched! it really provokes me to see him so taken in by that bold, glaring woman! I would warn him seriously to take care what he is about, only such advice always precipitates the catastrophe one dreads,—and happily I do not think he means to go so far as *that*. Elinor told him frankly how odious she thought her, and he minds what she says more than any remonstrance of mine."

"How little he talks of Miss Lee now, comparatively!" said Constance.

"Oh, he is not the same in any way, poor fellow, now, —that ill-starred journey through Tuscany, when the Cartarets stuck to us like burrs! he has not been himself ever since. But I am very selfish to trouble you with my burden; an old woman, you know, is often garrulous. I wish you could have stayed with us longer—I can say what I like to you!" Apparently she con-

sidered Constance quite heart-whole; and yet, with the curious dash of self-interest that so often alloys kindness, Miss Hyde had eagerly claimed her for a guest with an obscure hope that she might a little counteract the fascinations of Miss Cartaret,—and if *now* Basil could have loved and married Constance, she would have thought it a very happy thing,—so much did she *secretly* fear another more objectionable attachment. In her absorbing anxiety about *his* happiness, she forgot to consider whether that of Constance had been imperilled.

As they drove together to the station, all sorts of odd, out-of-the-way notions wandered through the poor girl's mind; almost a delirious quickness of thought affected her. She noticed two stout-looking young women, with hot, coarse faces, sitting at work by an upper room window, and began to think whether they were entirely exempt from such sorrow as hers; she saw a dusty miller passing by, and envied him for his cheerful, business-like intentness of face; a widow lady crossed the street, and she called her happy,—for she might have had *her* Basil for many years, and might call him hers still, though in heaven. And all this time she was talking with seeming attention to Miss Hyde, and looking out at each turn for a gentleman riding towards the station. There was none; Basil never came. His aunt blamed him severely in her thoughts, but only spoke of that "unscrupulous flirt who detains him," and in a few minutes Constance had received her last kiss, her fond good-bye, and was off. Then the flood-gates were allowed to open, and leaning back in a corner, she gave way to a passion of tears. She was almost alone; only a middled-aged woman sat at the other end of the carriage, a small tradesman's wife, who had a super-

stition about pickpockets in second-class carriages, and therefore took her place in the first class when returning home after the receipt of a considerable payment. When the crying had gone on some little time, she bent forward and said soothingly that she hoped there was not much amiss.

"Oh no, thank you," replied Constance.

"But, my dear lady, you look *so* bad; here's a bottle of salts to smell to — what I keeps handy in case of going off into a faint when there's an accident."

"That is very refreshing" said Constance, taking the offered kindness, and smelling the salts again and again, to hide emotion.

"If I may be so bold as to ask, does your mamma know you was ill when you left? You do look uncommon pale."

"Oh! it's nothing; only I have just parted with dear friends."

"Well, please God, you may meet them again," said the good woman kindly; "it seems long at first after leave-taking, but the time ain't so long as we look for it to be."

And she would have talked on, warmed by her pity, and so opened every wound afresh, had not her companion professed a wish to try and sleep a few minutes if she could.

Constance had never thought her father's and mother's welcome so tender as it seemed to-day, and for some time after her arrival, little Mary stood clasping her hand with all her tiny fingers, while patiently waiting to take her sister to see her garden and the young rabbits; and though, when she went, the child's merry prattle sounded immeasurably distant from her own thoughts, it was very soothing; it spoke of assured

love,—of affection to which her poor, ruined heart had still a right,—of hopes in which there was no hazard.

"They are pretty little things, indeed, Mary! Oh! look at that white one with a drab tail!" she said aloud; and to herself, "Patience! I *must* bear it. All over! he cares little or nothing for me now."

"But, Conny, you have not seen my gooseberry; nurse says she never saw such a little tree as mine bear one. I mean it to be for papa's birthday. Do look; it *has* set—very well too, gardener says."

And thought went on moaning secretly, "Ah! papa's birthday last year! Ah! fool that I was, praying not to be spoiled by such wonderful happiness—*happiness!*—Dear me, Mary, that gooseberry must make haste if it has to be ripe in three weeks; but perhaps it is an early sort. If a caterpillar takes it, or a bird, you won't be too much disappointed, will you? Such things often happen, just to teach us patience."

"Oh," said the child very seriously, "I would try not to mind; but Tib often walks about here, so I don't *think* the birds will dare come; and I look at it several times a day for fear of a snail or slug."

But at length the nurse came for her, and Constance was able to relax the reins of self-control, in her own room; and there she hoped so to arrange her thoughts and regulate her feelings as to remove, in some degree, the heavy weight of an unmeasured sorrow that had oppressed her all the day. In vain she tried to do so; it had numbed all her faculties, and she sat by the window, with a vacant, tearless gaze, all the time that her mother supposed her to be busy unpacking. Her eye passing over the piece of garden-ground beneath, fell on the adjoining yard, where a family of dusty pigs were slowly walking about, every now and then taking

a turn at eager routing, and animating each other with low grunts. She had watched a similar group, oh how often! and how often before seen the bent grass wave and flicker on the wall of the yard!—and now the only change of which her life seemed susceptible, was such as seeing successive generations of pigs get their ugly living, and a fresh growth of grasses flourishing and fading on the wall.

This, at least, was the representation of life which the "pathetic fallacy" set before her wearied soul; for all seemed unaltered and unalterable now. Beyond the yard there were the old willow trees by the brook, stirring their branches with the same soft, reckless movement she had so often watched, and probably in five minutes the door-bell would sound, and Miss Tennent would come in, with her shawl pinned in the same precise fashion, and her shattered voice saying exactly the same things that she always made a point of saying when Constance came home.

"Poor dear Miss Tennent!" she thought with a touch of remorse, "I must be ready to see her," and turning towards her boxes she began to hunt for a little present she had got for her in London; but in order to find it a parcel had to be undone, and scissors were wanted for the purpose. A work-box which had been left at home was on the table, and there she looked for scissors. What bitter mockery of fate comes to us sometimes from the merest trifle! In the box she had left a half-finished purse, which moves her strangely now—so much that her eyes are raised and her hands clasped in prayer. *Now,—now* she strives to believe all she has professed, and feel all she has known of the exceeding mercy which we call Providence. It was indeed a trifle, a purse netted in shades of red and green, but the silk

had been wound by Basil Hyde, the previous summer, on one of his visiting cards; and Constance had chosen these colours after hearing him tell Mrs. Felton that they were of necessity the prettiest contrast of colour. She had had happy minutes while netting that morsel of silk, for she had in her heart a shy intention of giving the purse to Basil some happy day when the ties of affection were strengthened. The knots of silk could not be loosened now, nor the bond of love at present; time, which had broken his, had made hers much stronger.

CHAP. XLVII.

"And I walked as if apart
From myself, when I could stand, —
And I pitied my own heart,
As if I held it in my hand, —
Somewhat coldly — with a sense
Of fulfilled benevolence,
And a 'Poor-thing' negligence."

MRS. BARRETT BROWNING.

MONDAY morning brought her colder trials, when, in the usual trouble of unpacking and re-arranging the same old things in their old places, each one aroused a new grief. How she wearied of it all; how she wondered that so much rubbish should live on, and turn up again and again, while infinitely precious hopes could wane and waste away!

And all the time she was supposed to have been so happy, and she felt that if she did not appear gay, and glad to return to her old haunts, every one would be struck with the alteration in her. To seem gay while every sight and sound struck pain into the heart with keen memories, to seem pleased when every detail of daily life was distasteful, was a difficult art: she only attempted serenity; it was as much as she could effect. Quiet, patient smiles were the gayest demonstrations her present mood made possible; and when Mrs. Felton said, "Are you well, my dear?" or "You look but poorly to-day,"—"I've nothing the matter with me,

indeed," was the only weapon she had for parrying a closer touch. Her father was too busy to notice slight variations of manner, but was accidentally surprised by seeing her hand tremble one day as she opened a letter.

"Who do you hear from, my child?" he asked, folding down the "Times" with a loud crackle.

"Miss Hyde, papa."

"All well at Burnham, I hope?"

"Yes, thank you, quite."

He saw distress on her face, and took up his newspaper again; but afterwards observing that she gave the letter to her mother to read when she came into the room, and that Mrs. Felton remarked after reading it, "What a kind letter it is!" he dismissed the notion of grief in that quarter, and supposed that girls sometimes cry from sheer gratitude.

It was a kind letter, but it cut his child to the heart.

"We were so sorry you *would* leave us. Basil was out nearly all day, and for the greater part of the week following—at the Cartarets', I suspect; so I was quite lonely, and missed you very much. But I know you were feeling too homesick to be happy with us any longer; it is the worst of having such a happy home that it makes you eager to leave your friends. But do not forget your old friend at Burnham, dear Constance, and come to us again as soon as you can."

Miss Hyde's ignorance was natural, and so was Mrs. Felton's when she said, "After your happy time away from home, I think, Conny, you ought to feel *so* active and ready for service: that is the best use of recreation and pleasure—that it gives us fresh power for our duties."

"Yes, mamma; I am going to the school this afternoon."

Thanks to the good principles early and carefully instilled by her parents, she was now able to persist in carrying on the external routine of duty when she had no stimulus except conscience: hopeless of any success, and disinclined for any effort, she went on, almost mechanically, fulfilling the tasks of the day; but she felt them unspeakably irksome.

Visits to poor people in the village, which used to be full of interest, seemed now a mere form, and it shocked her to find how utterly insensible she felt when they told her of their troubles.

"Very likely they do suffer," she would say to herself, "but a little money can make *their* affliction light: they don't hate their existence and dread the return of another day, as I do."

She had become painfully suspicious of the connection between a shilling given and a kind inquiry received; pleasant tones and pleasant looks at cottage doors seemed to have more to do with her money than herself, and the fancy that it was so embittered the sweetness of charity. Occasionally she would startle both Mrs. Felton and herself by the unwonted harshness of her tone, and her aptness to denounce any dubious line of conduct as hypocrisy. Grief had sharpened the edge of her judgment; no soft veil of illusion hung now between it and the common deformities of human nature: she saw them, and with loathing, for pity seemed dead within her.

Sometimes she thought of telling her father and mother how miserable she felt, but seeing a puckered brow bent over the butcher's book, or hearing a short broken-off sigh from her father, as he looked through business papers, banished the intention; it seemed selfish, apart from any motives of pride, to talk of such

private sorrow to *them*. No! she would go on trying, as well as she could, to seem happy, trying to make them so. Had she been in a sounder state of mind, she might have taken some little comfort from the quiet self-sacrifice which she thus exercised, unrewarded by any praise or even notice. This might have proved to her that her heart was not entirely petrified; but, missing the usual feeling, she quite overlooked the fact.

Her father wished for music as much as he ever had when it was a pleasure to her also, and evening after evening she went through the yellowing stores of music-books, with heavy heart and slow hands, in search of some air not haunted by memory, some song not so steeped in past associations but that she could go through it without danger of tears. Hard indeed to find; but duty was unaltered by pathos, and the performance of duty was all she hoped for now. Once or twice she half contemplated going to the Rectory and asking Mr. Croft to advise her; so confused and drifting from its old anchorage was the poor perplexed spirit, that she believed her faith was shaken when, for almost the first time in her life, she was acting wholly *upon faith*, and showing to the invisible world the inestimable value of its fruits. But Mr. Croft was a lively old bachelor, who always had something good-natured and trite to say about the scarcity of beaux for Miss Constance, whenever they dined with him; how could she go and tell him that her mind was disturbed because her heart felt broken? He would have cleared his throat so often, and rubbed his little hands so cheerfully all the time he listened, arching his eyebrows in amazement, and then used such long embarrassing words about it,—oh! it would *never* do. Mr. Croft was most good, and kind, and sensible in his way—gentle and

composed at the bedside of the sick, patient and acute in attending to the secular difficulties of his parishioners; but to deal with those of a love-sick girl would have been quite out of his line, and probably, if consulted on such a subject, he would have reached down a volume or two of the "Spectator," in quest of apposite counsel.

Nature was, as heretofore, her most consolatory companion; the elder trees were now spreading their wide flats of white blossom in many a cottage garden, and before they faded, midsummer came with sultry gloom, and the air looked dark under the low unshapely arches of the apple trees in Mr. Felton's orchard. Constance sat often among sweet haycocks, — it was delicious, it was soothing; but the thought of last summer, and of what was going on at Burnham now, pulled at her heart, and made such moments cruel. Driving home one evening a little later in the year, when the heavy twists of bryony were throwing a glossy length of green across the dusty hedge, she saw, as her eye turned listlessly downwards, that the pink-plaited convolvulus was again creeping to the roadside with a hundred shoots thickset with close-furled buds: she had noticed their beauty to Basil last summer, and had seen him drying a long row of their blossoms the next day. A flower of the wayside can sting with poignant remembrance; and when little Mary's cheek was warm and moist with sleep on her pillow, and the moths were flitting in the lime-scented moonlight, Constance knelt, pressing her brow against her bedside: she knelt, but could not pray; and there seemed to be a stifling silence within and without, till the solemn words sounded, unsought for, in her mind,—

"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

Over and over again she repeated them to herself;—they felt to her expressive of pity for all that burdens the human heart. Once she had been able to say, as often as the question came to mind, "Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." If *now* she could *feel* that, there would be peace; but while yet unable, she could remember that the Saviour still loved her; and then followed a crude idea that brought in a flood of consolation, as if it was a newly acquired truth — that the Creator *must* be interested in the good of His creature, be it ever so vile and insignificant. It was an elementary notion, but being drawn from her own mind, and opposed to its prevailing fear — "I am cast out of the sight of Thine eyes"—it had then more weight than any she could have found in good books.

And all this sad time patience had been having her perfect work, and the great ends of probation had been answered. Finding that happiness was certainly not the *main* purpose of this life, she began to feel a stronger conviction that submission to the will of God was; for now this and duty seemed the only anchors left to her, — resignation, and the unalterable sense of right and wrong, the only spiritual possessions that she had saved in her total wreck. Happy soul! the riches of her transitory hope were wrecked indeed, but she found herself cast on the sure and abiding Rock which has been and shall be the refuge and defence of innumerable helpless generations.

CHAP. XLVIII.

"Leer und erstorben ist meine Zukunft."—SCHILLER.

"To rende a cherishede loue aparte
Alle efforte fayleth;
It sorelye grieueth the poore harte,
And ne'er prevayleth:

"Memorye, that fayne wold banishe itt,
Still is pursuinge,
And the harde struggle to forgett
Is the renewinge."—ANONYMOUS.

IT was a more uneventful summer than usual, even at Ashenholt. Harriet went abroad with the Lycetts; Charles was at sea; Adelaide Page absorbed as a *fiancée;* with the Podmores the only intercourse consisted of an occasional letter from Mrs. Podmore, emphatic in uncalled-for advice, and sometimes a dry note from Johanna; Uncle Graham was unobtainable,—too busy to leave home (*i. e.* too little inclined to be interrupted in his favourite pursuits); and, excepting two dull dinner parties, a school feast, a much wrought and little enjoyed picnic, and the regular sprinkling of conscientious morning calls, Constance had no kind of distractions from without. Visits from Miss Tennent and Mr. Croft were habitual, but not very recreating, varieties: to the charitable schemes of both, for the good of their poor neighbours, she gave herself with all the heartiness she could,—and this increased; she was thankful to find

that time, and prayers, and patience had restored much of her early zeal; and after one of Miss Hyde's letters — a rare pleasure always — in which it was too clear that the Cartaret influence still gained ground, Constance was surprised at the coolness with which she could put the letter away, and set off to the village school, mingling thoughts about Burnham with calculations of the number of yards of print that her little pupils must have for their lesson in cutting out half a dozen frocks. She did not before know all the meaning of the Arabian maxim, "Despair is a freeman, hope is a slave." Practically, despair of her own heart's joy had emancipated her from a great deal of egotism; her own life had so little interest now, that her thoughts turned more easily to the interests of other people.

It was singular how the last few months had altered her feelings about Miss Tennent. Curiosity began the change. She had lately been able to imagine herself a faded spinster; if she lived, she was sure that that was what she was coming to,— a quiet, uninteresting creature in neat caps and unvarying dresses, going about on errands of mild service; offering useful recipes to busier friends; knitting and netting useless adjuncts for more luxurious rooms than her own; writing dull long letters in dreary days to felicitate young friends on their brighter lot; becoming a familiar bore by slow degrees, as the affection of other people was increased, and the perception of her own stupidity decreased by ever encroaching habit, — yes, that was the lot Heaven designed for her, — distasteful enough! but if Paradise was beyond, and there she might tell Basil how she had loved him, it was but an interlude.

Then came the thought that possibly Miss Tennent's hopes had faded as well as her ribbon-workbag, — they

might have been of the same date; and one dusky evening during a prolonged stay — comprising tea time — she skilfully approached the subject of disappointed hearts, while Mr. and Mrs. Felton escaped into the garden for fresh air and fresher tones than the dear old lady emitted. It did not take long to disinter the buried treasure of her patient heart; its grave was green still: a prelude of sighs, a slow wavering shake of the head, and it all came out;— declared affection on both sides, a father's stern prohibition, a lover's speedy attachment to another who was free to marry whom she would, his widowhood, and comparatively recent marriage to an intimate friend of her own, "though he knew, my dear, that *I* remained single,"— this was Miss Tennent's story; the simplicity of a good heart made it a touching one, and, without revealing her own grief, Constance showed such lively sympathy, that the narrator passed the corner of her handkerchief over her own eyes, — symbolising tears which were not there, because those of her hearer glittered, — she was long past weeping for *that* old hope,— and took another piece of muffin before Constance had ended her ejaculations of pity.

From that day her calls on Miss Tennent became more frequent and willing. She could now discern the latent poetry of her monotonous existence; her old ornaments, old books, old stories oft repeated, had now a pathetic interest: going back in thought to the years when they were fresh with the quick feelings of youth, Constance ceased to complain of their present staleness; —a tinge of gold, a lingering gleam of love, illuminated for her all the dust that time heaps upon past passion.

"And oh! that mine *was* past!" she often thought;

"oh! that I could by any means silence this famished cry within me—if I could forget him but for a day!" She could not yet—the calm waters of oblivion creep towards us very slowly: but in two points she was now well prepared for the perfect recovery of her peace,—she *had* done with a false hope, wholly resigning it in submission to the will of God; and if in her saddest hours she had been seen, no expression would have been discovered more painful than

"Conquered hope's meek anguish in her face."*

And there was no irritation in her feelings towards Basil. Her humility and good sense saved her from a miserable conflict of indignation and love; she did not even call herself *wronged;* she still loved him too much to let him bear any of the blame which she could in sincerity take to herself; she had misled him by shyness and ignorance of human nature; she thought she was not worthy of *his* love ever: why then call him cruel because he had found this out in time to draw back? If he *had* given her reason to believe him attached (and that she could in nowise deny, even in her generous self-accusation), yet probably he thought that she had felt little or nothing in return. Oh! if he would but marry a better woman than herself,—if he might but be loved and made as happy by another as she would have tried to make him,—she could thankfully accept her doom. Such were her thoughts during many a summer evening, while she sat under a tree in one of her father's home-fields, listening to the idly busy sound of sheep-bells all around her.

She had grown thin and far paler than she naturally

* Crabbe.

was in the last eight months, and much as she disliked comments upon her want of appetite and loss of strength, she could not avoid them; every one could see that she was getting quite out of health, and, a slight cough having been heard several evenings in the early part of September, Mr. Felton became seriously anxious, forbade evening rambles, and insisted on Mr. Bland seeing her.

The doctor looked grave when he heard all that Mrs. Felton could tell him, all that Constance admitted; he urged the need of care, for certainly there was great prostration of strength, delicacy of constitution, and several symptoms he did not like. Poor Constance! *she* liked them only too well in her inmost heart. She had gradually formed the idea that she was going into a decline, and though she would have scorned the imputation of taking this notion from the usual story-book fate of unhappy heroines, she certainly did read again very carefully the story entitled "Consumption," in the "Diary of a late Physician," to see how it came on: and there were now minutes when her spirits rose suddenly because she felt so ill that she thought her earthly trials would not last much more than a year. So strong was this conviction becoming, that she felt occasionally that sort of distant gazing into the course of every-day life, which those experience who fancy that death is very near,—with an amazed sense of sudden remoteness from all that is done and felt around them, which they cannot express for fear of alarming friends, while they almost wonder that it is not divined from their manner.

And now she would please herself by arranging in her mind all that she should say to Basil in a letter which, after her death, was to be found for him in her desk. In this she might speak to him as if she were already a

spirit; she might tenderly entreat that he would never quite forget her, who must remember him in bliss, if any of this world's feelings can be carried beyond the grave. It was a relief to pour out in fancy the pathetic eloquence of love; to imagine what he would say, and look, and feel, when he heard of her death; to resolve that not a word of painful remonstrance should escape her, lest it should grieve him; and then, with humble faith, to use the prayers "for those who are dangerously ill," which, however, she was not: Mr. Bland had said the worst when he called it a case needing great care.

On a heartbroken-looking day, the last of September, Constance got a letter from Miss Hyde: with instinctive caution she left it unopened till breakfast was over and she could read it alone in the drawing-room. It was well she did. Miss Hyde wrote to tell her Basil was to be married to Anne Cartaret on the 10th of October; they had been engaged many months, she said, long before she was aware even of the attachment. "Poor Basil dreaded to give me pain." For still she spoke of him as the victim, and of Miss Cartaret as a persecuting wooer; and went on to mention several pranks and peculiarities of conduct by which she had secured her prey, with the sly innuendo that these were hardly attributable to the playfulness of youth, Miss Cartaret being past thirty at the very least.

Blanched as the mind of Constance had been in the sheltered seclusion of her quiet country life, she had no conception of those various shades of right and wrong which the world's highway elicits; and to her such conduct seemed positively guilty.

She lifted her eyes from the letter to the window opposite; an arch of thick laurel leaves at the near end of the shrubbery was the only object cut out against

a wall of dense fog; no breath stirred it, no robin with his song of subdued joy broke the heavy silence.

"Here," thought Constance, "what lightless monotony of gloom! And far away beyond that veil of mist is the sunshine of his smile, his joyous laugh, for he *must* be happy now, even if his love is misplaced,—*he* must be pleased; and he forgets me, he contents himself with her slightness. Be it so; he is then unworthy of my love." For *now* her pride was roused; perhaps she had too little generally, or, to speak more accurately, she was wanting in that kind of strength of which pride is only the excess, or faulty exponent. Now there is a rejoicing in the strength of pride, and in the clasp of accepted fate, which gives to a nature like hers unfeigned exaltation of spirits; she felt this to-day, and those who watched her most closely would have noticed her manner as being particularly cheerful.

She answered Miss Hyde's letter at once, rather stiffly and in fewer words than usual; but this her friend accounted for as resulting from preoccupation of mind, for Constance told her that they were going to the seaside in about ten days, their doctor having ordered it for her health, but that it was not yet decided where they should go.

CHAP. XLIX.

"Make not choice of a fool, for she will be thy continual disgrace, and it will yirke thee to hear her talk, for thou shall find it, to thy great grief, that there is nothing more fulsome than a she-fool." — LORD BURLEIGH'S *Advice to his Son.*

So, after a few very odd transactions, and a great many very common ones, Miss Cartaret and Basil were married. It happened that for two or three days after their wedding-day Constance was kept in her room, in consequence of catching a bad cold. Mr. Bland provoked her by calling it only a bad cold in the head, rather a favourable symptom than otherwise; and all æsthetic enjoyment of melancholy at that particular time was marred by the yellow flannel dressing-gown in which Mrs. Felton swathed her, and the bottles of draughts and "mixture as before" that stood around her table: these were her only companions for hours together, while Basil was spending his honeymoon at the Lakes, and Anne Cartaret hung on his arm.

As soon as she was well enough for a journey, the change to the sea-side was most welcome. They went to Bournemouth, and gave themselves up to enjoyment: by the sea Constance could find it, as well as her parents and the child. Too ill to take much exercise, she was able to indulge in the pastime that pleased her best,—sitting on warm days on the shore, in doubtful weather by the window, feasting her eyes and her soul on the

near infinitude of the ocean,—never weary of hearing it "moan round with many voices," and of seeing the swelling ambition of its tumbling waves break down to whispered sighs: she would often beg to be left alone, and assure her companions that if they would set off on a distant expedition, she should pass the time as happily as they.

After spending here three weeks, the day before they returned to Ashenholt, Mr. and Mrs. Felton had taken Mary for a long ramble, a farewell visit to a distant point; and, the afternoon being very warm, Constance lay on a couch by the window till after sunset.

It was a cloudy, airless time, the scene before her singularly inviting to reverie; one eye of light opened in the thick grey that covered the western sky, and it seemed to gaze on the ever-rolling billows with the vague melancholy that dims a becalmed spirit when watching eagerness in others, however vain. The stars came out here and there towards the east, night was falling on all earthly objects; but still the wan gleam watched the tide restlessly straining up the pebbled beach.

Constance was just rising to shut the window, when accents caught her ear which made her heart-beatings sound almost as loud: it was he—Basil was coming along under the window, his wife walking fast beside him, and talking and laughing shrilly, with the vivacity that distinguished all her movements. Constance had time to notice that his head was stooping, his arm listlessly swinging a stick, his answers monosyllabic and low. Shag ran behind him with his mouth propped open by a stone; the poor beast evidently treating it as something his master valued.

It was the vision of a few moments—*could* it be that

she should never see him again? Wild thoughts and contradictory wishes thronged her mind. Did Basil know she was there? he had not even glanced towards the house. Should they send to inquire if he was at either of the principal hotels? Nay, that was an absurdity, out of the question; and if they should meet, what then? congratulations, or condolences? or tears and low-voiced greetings, while his wife chattered fast and stared?

"Your pulse is too high, my love," said Mr. Felton when she wished him good-night; and "Miss Felton did not rest at all well," said nurse, who slept in the same room with her, the next morning; and languid eyes looked earnestly out of the coach window till they were miles away from Bournemouth — but they never saw Basil again.

Constance seldom cared to look at the local newspapers, and her father, who always did, must have missed the list of arrivals in the paper for the previous week, or they would have seen Mr. and Mrs. Hyde duly announced several days before. The odd chance was that on neither of these days had they met. It was fortunate both for Basil and Constance that they had not; with a woman's quickness of perception, she would have discovered at once that he was unhappy, and he would have been undesirably conscious of her sympathy, however her delicacy might have veiled it.

He was already weary of a constant *tête-à-tête* with a woman whose perceptions were too much blunted by egotism to be aware of any deficiency of feeling on his side, or of what there was to account for it on hers; if he was silent and thoughtful she told him he was "hipped" for want of society, and, intending to make her own more cheerful, would run on with lively gabble

about a hundred matters in which he had not the slightest interest, betraying in every turn of expression that native vulgarity of mind which even love fails to refine: but the gentleness of his manner towards her increased, and when his taste was jarred most, he seldom showed those signs of quick impatience which he would have indulged in with a more congenial mate. Was there already a suspicion in his heart that forbearance and kindness were *all* he could possibly give?

His letters to his aunt were so frequent and tender, that his wife often rallied him upon being such a very devoted nephew; but finding that on *that* point he would often answer her sternly, she grew more cautious, and thought to smooth him down by loudly reiterating, "I'm sure, dear, you'll find *I* am always ready to give your aunt a kind welcome."

And a speech that more deeply grazed his feelings could not have been devised, for Miss Hyde's steadfast resolve to leave Burnham and take a house in London was one of the results of his marriage that he most regretted; while at the same time he could not resist the plan with any sincerity, for a few weeks had taught him that what he found trying in his wife's character, his aunt would denounce as intolerable, before they had been together a week in the same house. And he loved his aunt so dearly. A man hardly knows, till the change is made rather late in life, how much daily comfort has been secured by the vigilant affection of one who has devoted herself to him from his earliest and most wayward years. Basil knew it now.

Miss Hyde accepted her trial with fortitude;—she had tasted the bitterest drop in her cup of life when Basil told her he was engaged to a woman she wholly disliked: after *this*, all other troubles were compara-

tively small. A convenient house was fixed upon, and while she spent part of November at General Lee's, Basil's greatest interest consisted in going often to London for the day, to see that everything was made comfortable and agreeable for her: if his wife complained of his absence, he told her that it was as much his duty to do this as it was hers to see more of her poor old father than she seemed inclined to do.

Alas! the house which he had prepared with such loving care was never occupied by his aunt: before December came she was removed to a home where there is no sighing: she took a violent cold which ended in fatal inflammation; and when Basil had taken his last look of the cold, regardless face, which an hour before had been so eloquent of love, there was no one to comfort him: Elinor had left England with her husband, whose regiment was ordered to Gibraltar; and his wife—wrote, as soon as she heard of Miss Hyde's death, to ask if he would order the servants' mourning at some place less expensive than Jay's.

In the suddenness of this removal there was no time for messages, or for naming tokens of remembrance for friends. "Do not regret me, Basil; it is best for *all* that I should go," was the only expression, relating to death, which he could catch from her failing voice during the many hours that he watched at her bedside.

The news of such a departure brought to Constance a peculiar sense of desolation. When told that her friend was no more, quite beyond reach in the cruel unconsciousness of death, it seemed to cut away the present from the past,—to make the kindness and affection shown to her in bygone days as dream-like and transitory as their hopes had been; and with her kind old friend all chance of further knowledge of Basil's welfare

and goings-on was at an end also. She longed to write to him herself; she began to do so several times, but, failing to express her compassion with any feeling, in the guarded terms she used, gave up the attempt, and only begged her father when he wrote to add her most sincere condolences to his own.

News from another quarter about this time also, brought her real concern. Adelaide's engagement was broken off. The young officer was plausible enough to meet all demands of romance for a drawing-room hero; elsewhere his character did not bear investigation, and after there had been much inquiry, hesitation, and annoyance, Captain Trevor, professing indignation, betrayed such coldness and indifference, that Mr. Robert Felton succeeded in convincing his daughter that it was both her duty and her interest to have done with him.

For several weeks following she despatched almost daily lamentations to her pitying cousin, often declaring that Selina provoked her by her heartless insensibility. Poor sister! who had to see her weep, and hear her grieve part of every day: it was no wonder if she yawned now and then at a pathetic crisis, or looked as stolid as usual when the first sob predicted a scene, a passionate fling upon the sofa, a maternal application of sal-volatile and texts, and a despairing cry that such cruel affliction was killing her.

In her letters Constance said everything consolatory that she could think of; she sympathised deeply with Adelaide, and was very patient with her, or she could not have given such careful answers to the much-dashed, many-ah!-ed, exclamatory effusions she received. After a while there was a pause, and for some weeks Adelaide did not reply to her last letter.

During this interval a letter had to be written to

Clayfield Lodge, which it was a pleasure for Constance to post; it was to congratulate James Podmore on his marriage. The fine house he intended to occupy at Clayfield was handsomely furnished, and his mother was divided between satisfaction in his choice of wife and furniture, and sorrow at losing him from her side. The bride was a young widow to whom banking business had lately introduced him; — "a very sweet Christian," was Mrs. Podmore's descriptive phrase, and "humbly alive to her privileges,"—an expression which gave Constance some amusement, being so evidently used in contrast to her own unworthy estimation of the same: but there must have been too much precipitance in the mother's judgment of the son's wife, for in a subsequent letter she was mentioned rather severely as one who had not "ceased to love the world," — which was a very strong proof of its attractions, considering the proximity of such a mother-in-law, and her frequent visits of inspection.

Contrary to all her expectations, Constance was regaining health and strength of spirits; she wondered to find herself as calm and contented as she now felt. Knowing nothing of Basil's fate since his marriage, she supposed it to be tolerably happy, and to her own she was fully resigned. She was now able to see — what few are sufficiently clear-sighted to detect—the impress of her *own* character, moulding her lot in just its most trying peculiarity: she saw that, however unconsciously, her own hand had helped to put away from her the happiness for which there is no earthly substitute; and seeing this, she was still resigned, knowing that in thus making her own destiny she was but an instrument in the hand of the Most High.

One afternoon she employed herself in writing and sending to Adelaide the following verses: —

"If love is gone,
Try not to win it back;
As wisely might'st thou seek at eve the track
Of sunbeams where they shone.

"They shone, and set
Far down behind the hills;
And Nature calmly waits night's deadly chills;
As calm be thy regret.

"Longer thy night,
More killing keen its frost;
But should the sunshine of thy life be lost
Till heavenly dawn brings light;

"Let no lament
Follow the heart that flies;
Enough it grieves when old affection dies,
The last illusion spent:

"Enough it grieves —
Doubting and struggling long —
Loath to inflict inevitable wrong,
Or give what still deceives.

"Oh, then be just!
Nor only mourn thy fate;
Unloose the hand that longs to separate;
Is pity gone with trust?

"If love can die,
If that deep heartspring fail, —
It may be that the wings of Time avail
To fan this tear-flood dry."

The melancholy calmness of her own feelings breathed in these lines. It was the time of sunset, but no sign of it was visible, except a slight flush in the thick clouds that had made the day so dark; though only two days before Christmas, it was delightful out of doors still, and Constance went into the garden.

A soft west wind shook the lances of the willow bed,

and gave a gentle swaying to the elm and leafless ash, where a few thrushes were piping "calm-throated," incredulous of winter. On the ground many little sheaves of crocus shoots, many green spears from other bulbs, too early roused by an unusually mild season, received the yellow leaf drifting from neighbouring trees, and the pale petals of the china rose, falling scentless and wet at the touch of the passing breeze. Constance stayed to gather a few Christmas roses, and to listen to the birds; it was one of those strange moments when a sudden extasy seemed to overpower all habitual feelings; she did not think of Basil then. Thoughts of him did not come back till she was in the quiet drawing-room, when she began to picture to herself *his* fireside, and how his wife tried to soften the pang of a keenly remembered loss.

But how was it at Burnham in truth? Anything but as she fancied in her gentle, sympathising mind. Basil's wife was frivolous and unfeeling in her conduct to him; a selfish and thoughtless woman must be so; and so far she did him great wrong; yet hardly so cruel a wrong as he had inflicted on her, when he offered a dubious and feeble love, and married her because she admired him, not because he felt much either of admiration or affection for her. In her own way she once loved him ardently, but he was gradually curing her of that by the growing harshness of a broken spirit, that pants to be quit of one whom duty plants beside it at every turn of every day, with relentless, persecuting constancy.

Adelaide did not take any notice of her cousin's letter or verses until the beginning of February, when, dating from London, she wrote in extasies of delight at all the gaieties she was enjoying at the house of her mother's

other. "You know every one says this is the very st thing for me now; my only fear is of meeting poor ar Lionel at some party, but that would be *too* dread- l. Can I do any shopping for you while I am here? adame de Lisse has the most *charming* bonnets you n conceive. I wish you and aunt Felton would com- ssion me to choose some for you. Oh! I forgot to ank you for those pretty lines, as good, I am *sure*, as e poems people put in country papers. I cannot *think* w you made them out; such things never come into y head." Adelaide had done with one romance, and s quite ready for another.

CHAP. L.

"Small was his house, and like a little cage,
For his owne turne; yet inly neate and cleane,
Deckt with greene boughes and flowers gay beseene:
Therein he them full faire did entertaine,
Not with such forged showes as fitter beene,
For courting fooles that curtesies would faine,
But with entire affection and appearance plaine."

SPENSER'S *Fairy Queen.*

AT the beginning of the year Constance would have denied the possibility of anything happening during its course that could make her extremely happy: hope had become bankrupt, and only made little ventures for the next day on the humblest scale; but all of a sudden a great joy overtook her. Uncle Graham had been told of her ill-health and frequent depression. Indeed she had confessed to him in her letters so much, as to give him a pretty good guess of what had happened in her singularly uneventful life. He had prescribed for her with affectionate skill, a course of interesting study, and a strict adherence to method in the disposal of every day; and for love of him she had followed his advice as much as she could.

In September he had a fall from his horse which fractured his ancle, and shook him so severely that for some days still more serious mischief was apprehended; and as soon as he was a little better (the first time he

could write his own bulletin), he begged his brother to lend Constance to him for a companion, through the many weeks of forced inactivity which his doctor predicted: he said that he knew it was rather a cool request, considering her importance at home, and the long journey into Wales, but he had the less scruple in making it, because he was sure that such a change would be in every way good for her, and might fortify her health before winter came. Mr. Felton found it impossible to refuse anything his favourite brother so much wished for: the following week he accompanied Constance to her uncle's far-away home, and after a few days of mutual enjoyment, left her there for an indefinite period. As for her, she could hardly believe her own happiness when she found herself surrounded by Welsh hills, and sitting beside her uncle in his curiously old-fashioned house;—everything in it caused her pleasure or surprise; it was so small, so picturesque, so original in all its arrangements.

If the walls had not been so closely lined with bookcases,—if the tables had not been covered with objects of artistic and scientific interest, she might have been struck with the faded old paper on the one, and the spindle legs and many cracks of the other; but her eye, delighted with the treasures around it, hardly perceived the poorness of the furniture. Even the cumbrous tea-tray which her uncle's one servant—(a knotty-featured woman who had grown old in his service), planted with a vigorous thump on the table next his sofa, did not break the illusion that everything here was charming;—nor the battered teapot, which leaked unless the tea was poured with a peculiar sideways turn; nothing mattered, nothing was unpleasant while she could make tea for him, and talk, and hear him talk for hours together,

only varying the pleasure by reading to herself, or aloud to him, such books as he directed her to study.

She had not felt so gay, so childlike in happiness for many a long year; for her uncle though a worn-looking man of fifty-eight, prematurely aged by weak health and unbroken study, was much more cheerful than her father, and unusually exempt from care. His small income went further here, where he lived in the utmost retirement, than it could do in England: he was utterly regardless of mere appearances, and only luxurious in matters of charity, and intellectual enjoyment. It was perhaps just because he made no effort, and felt no wish for social honour, that his acquaintance was courted by the few in his thinly-peopled district who could at all appreciate a richly cultivated mind: but whenever he entered society, it was upon his own terms — as an original thinker who would not submit to any fetters imposed on him by other men. Perhaps he was too proud of independence, too fond of keeping aloof from minds which had nothing in common with his own; but among the poor he had a large and loving acquaintance, and with the rich and high-bred his manners were never in rude contrast to those of more worldly polish, for *his* refinement was in-grain, and his self-restraint the effect of unfeigned holiness; if he had any awkwardness in society, it was from the reserve of pride, never from the flutterings of vanity.

In close intercourse with such a nature Constance felt the resources of her own doubled; and the influence of a mind set so high in aspiration lifted hers, with unconscious sympathy, far above its usual level. Her uncle never spoke condescendingly to any one: it was part of his creed, that in every human being there is a mighty spirit—however veiled and fettered it

may be — on which it would be arrogance for a fellow-creature to pretend to look down. The foolish, ignorant and perverse were to him only pitiable, as spirits made blind by disease; they *could* not anger him by their deficiencies: but he was not without temptations to wrath and contempt when he found any one who *had* known the blessing of light, despising and condemning those who thought and acted under the thousand disadvantages of darkness — whether spiritual or mental. In judging of the former he found it difficult to remember that half-lights are often more confusing than complete obscurity; and that those who mistake the dawn of truth for its full daylight, naturally suppose *themselves* safe.

Constance was not allowed to neglect the advantage of air and exercise while her uncle was confined to the house: he regularly sent her out, with the great bloodhound that formed part of his small household, to enjoy fresh breezes on the heathery hill-side, where she might walk long and far without meeting any one except a shepherd.

When she came back she often said to him, "You are almost tired of being alone, I hope?" and he often answered, "Oh, not at all; Leslie has been up here half the time. He looked at my foot and says it is going on pretty well;" — and without thinking more about it, she concluded that "Leslie" was his doctor, till one day, having met a young man coming out of her uncle's garden as she returned from her walk, she said at tea-time, "What a nice-looking person your doctor is, uncle. I think such a happy, honest face would do me good if I was ill: he opened the wicket-gate for me to-day, as I came in, so I had an opportunity of looking at him."

"Ah, Leslie you mean; a very good fellow, and studying medicine now, but not my regular medical man. I got rid of him some days back. You must not call Leslie my doctor, Constance, for fear old Mr. Morgan should hear it. The truth is *I* think Leslie's opinion worth more than his, but it would give him all the pains of professional jealousy to know that I did; and Welsh natures are hot."

"But, uncle, who is that Mr. Leslie? he is not a Welshman, is he?"

"No; a friend of mine who came from Shropshire this summer to be near me for a year or so. He fancies I can help him in chemical matters; I have a very good collection of books and implements for chemical purposes, but the disciple outstrips his master already. You see a cottage down there, with its white-washed chimnies, by that thread of a stream; that is where he lodges; and I find his company pleasant, though we don't agree quite in opinions; he is still young, and positive where older people doubt."

A day or two after this meeting out of doors, Constance found Mr. Leslie in her uncle's study when the rain drove her in half an hour earlier than usual. His back was turned to the door as she entered it, and she heard him say, as she passed, with a nod to her uncle, into the adjoining room, "Well, Sir, I don't suppose there's a better paced horse than mine in the whole country, and as soon as you can get upon it, a short ride will do you a world of good,—there's old Susan Jones asking when you can come every time I see her. I think I shall save her a doctor's bill; that embrocation I was telling you of the other day is wonderfully successful. I never saw anything work better."

"Ay, ay," said his companion, good-humouredly, "as *your* invention of course it must be excellent."

In many interviews that followed, Constance had opportunity of studying a character which to her appeared a very singular one; it was so buoyant with cheerful egotism, so sanguine and so strangely confident, except where ladies were concerned, and with them, at first, John Leslie was almost shy. He had never known either a mother or a sister's companionship, and had been very little in the world. But in Mr. Graham Felton's presence it was impossible for any one to be stiff; and after a little while Leslie resumed habits which the presence of a young lady visitor had interrupted, and would drop in at any hour of the day, and upon any imaginable pretext, for the pleasure of half an hour's chat.

His mind was fresh, though not in the least original, and his affectionate respect for her uncle soon prejudiced Constance in his favour. If the invalid was less well, or if one of his rare fits of depression had fallen upon him,—depression that was more sad to witness than the collapse of a feebler spirit—it was quite a comfort to see Mr. Leslie bounding up the hill-side, towards the house, for his voice and look were gladdening, and he was often able to relieve the anxiety he so fully shared: and thus in the course of a week or two they were on the easy-going terms of old acquaintance.

So at least she considered them; and when he brought a rare heath for her botanical collection, or offered a carnation for her flower-pot from his little cottage garden, they were accepted with the simple cordiality of one who did not think of them as meaning anything else.

"See, dear uncle," she would say, while their visitor's lively blue eye sparkled with pleasure, "see what a lovely bunch of flowers Mr. Leslie has brought us; you

must wear this clove-pink, for it is your favourite; but you will see more of this pretty geranium if I keep it in my brooch, and the rest shall stand in this glass beside you; but, Mr. Leslie, if you think of it when you next go by the waterfall, will you please bring me some club-moss for putting round the vase?"

She never had to ask him twice for any little service he could render; and "he is a good fellow for being so devoted to my uncle," was her inmost thought.

The intimacy affected him differently. Professional studies had made him more of a recluse than young men of his age generally like to be, and of ladies' society he had hardly known anything beyond a circle of country-town cousins, whose manners, recently pinched and glazed by the *régime* of a second-rate boarding-school, were more expressive of a *missy* determination to keep gentlemen at a safe distance, than of any pleasure in their conversation. A shy but almost explosive titter, was the only sign of gratification which cousin John had ever gained when trying, in boyish fashion, to amuse them; consequently it was to him a surprising and an enchanting novelty to meet with a person like Miss Felton, who enjoyed his conversation for its own sake; tried to entertain him pleasantly for her uncle's; and being now "enfranchised by sorrow" cared little, and seldom considered what was thought of herself, so that she yielded to her womanly instincts of kindness and sympathy without fancying that any one could mistake them for a more distinctive attention; besides, when she had failed to win that for which she had given her heart, how could she think herself winning? It was the last idea that would have occurred to *her*.

Unwittingly she quite misled John Leslie. When she found for him a passage which gave a great writer's

authority for some opinion that he had advanced in opposition to her uncle's, he thought it evident that she regarded *him* as a genius; or when, from innate courtesy she deferred to his tastes in any trifling domestic arrangement, he was touched by the delicate attention; and when once she said, "Oh, Mr. Leslie, we were hoping to see you this evening," he was quite enraptured, though her next words were "my uncle's foot does not seem going on well altogether, I think he will be glad to consult you about it."

The flowing, graceful benignity of her manner appeared to him especially meant *for* him; he was of blunt perception at the best of times, and had no opportunity of studying her demeanour towards other gentlemen.

CHAP. LI.

"But when remembrance past
Hath laid dead coals together,
Old loue renewes his blast
That caused my joyes to wither.

"Then sodainly a spark
Startes out of my desire;
And lepes into my heart,
Setting the coals a fire.

"Then reason runnes about
To seke forgetful water,
To quench and clene put out
The cause of all this matter."—GASCOIGNE.

CONSTANCE sat by the open window watching the sunset one golden October day, feasting placid eyes on the crimson and amethyst tints that trembled over the mountainous distance, while she waited till her uncle closed his book for conversation,—their usual twilight enjoyment. She was happy, and had been thinking with thankfulness what a rest it was after the last year and a half, to be able to pass a whole day without the longings of hope which had gnawed at her heart so continually, waking when she woke, and seldom lulled by any application of the mind to other things.

Any keen pleasure had given them terrible vivacity; beautiful sights or sounds had raised such a clamour within for Basil; had seemed to urge forward the desire for his presence as a *necessity;* and, passing away, had left a cold languor upon every feeling but love: now

she was once more her own again, free from passion—free from its fearful fixity of thought, and she could delight in the loveliness around her, though Basil could now see the most glorious sights on earth without a thought of her. She made so sure of that, she supposed him so much happier than he was, that even when a rumour reached her through Harriet that Mr. Hyde was travelling on the continent alone, while his wife remained in England, she took it for granted that there was some mistake in the report, or that there was only a temporary delay in Mrs. Hyde's time of starting. Morning and evening she prayed for him and for her, as for the one he loved best; and if a thought of his wife's comparative unworthiness would intrude, it was silenced at once, not only by conscience, but by the thought that almost *all* attachments are more or less inexplicable.

"For me," she said to herself as the sun's golden rim sunk out of sight, "I have done with love for ever; anything less than what I have known would be worthless; anything *like* that I can never feel again." For now she classed all the sweetness and the pain of love in a sweeping generalization, and could *thus* think it easy to resign love for life; but it is possible that one moment of its fascinations would have made all her cold resolves to waver, and she might have been a natural woman again, and not only a patient thinker.

"How long it seems since Leslie has been here," said her uncle, putting down his book. "I wonder what the boy has been doing with himself."

"Really four or five days," replied Constance.

"What do you think of him, Conny? do you like him?"

"Very much; he's so good-natured and frank, and

such a good-tempered looking man, too; but I sometimes fancy he is rather too full of himself, and his own doings and possessions; perhaps I dislike it as an encroachment upon one's own self-love, but egotism is certainly unpleasant."

"You call it egotism, and no doubt it is, but will it make his fault appear to you less condemnable if I own, that throughout my life I have found the most honest natures more *obviously* egotistical than others?—mind, not more full of self-love or self-interest by any means, but more candid in expressing what is the *first* instinct with us all."

"I can quite believe that, but surely, dear uncle, there is a great want of elegance of manner and good taste, when the ugly corners of our hearts are thrown open to the public? Some one is at the gate. Oh, it is Mr. Leslie."

"Why, Leslie, we were just wondering at your five days' absence. I suppose you thought you might throw me overboard, now I can walk upstairs without help."

"No, sir. I have been from home; I had to be best man to an old schoolfellow who was married last week, and when I was in Shropshire, I found it impossible to come away sooner,—so many old neighbours to see. I hope you have continued to gain ground,—does Miss Felton think so?"

"You never told us that you were going to be so gay," said Constance, after medical inquiries had been answered.

"I came up the afternoon before I left, and found you were both out, the day you say you had a drive; but I left a message with Bridget, which I suppose she did not think worth remembering, if she took it in."

He lingered in the room for another half hour, but

seemed unusually silent; to be at a wedding is always a rather melancholy affair to ardent natures,—to be close to the intense emotions of another heart without the possibility of sharing them, weighs down the spirits, makes people conscious of their *capacity* for intense joys, while they feel more than ever the burden of duller prospects, or the coldness of calm good sense.

Leslie gave no account to himself of his heavy mood, and only told Constance in answer to her questions about the wedding that it was a stupid, slow proceeding, —that the bride cried more than was pleasant, and her father and mother looked very serious; and altogether it was hard work to keep any fun going, and a great many stale jokes and forced laughs were the consequence: the truth was, that it was an imprudent marriage,— lots of love and very little money to go upon; and several elderly ladies who were present shook their heads awfully, and sighed with looks of formidable discretion, while healths were being drunk.

"Dear me!" cried Constance, "every one ought to have been more congratulatory than usual, on such an unworldly match; I daresay they will get on very well, —at any rate, better than those who marry for money."

"So my friend thought," replied Leslie, "but he could not make it clear to me, how they were to get on upon something less than 300*l.* a year: you see he was as sanguine as romantic young ladies can be."

Not quite liking to be called romantic even by implication, Constance let the subject drop, and even refrained from taking any notice of something he muttered about a man having no right to propose unless he was rich; an opinion she thought detestable, not guessing that he put it forward on purpose for her to contradict. Vexed at her silence, he went on to say that he believed

many a man, and many a woman married now with positive dislike, merely for the sake of wealth and position; a remark to which Mr. Felton answered, with a kindly laugh, "You have imbibed a good deal of the world's malaria, my friend, during these few days; suppose we have supper early, you will be all the better for a glass of wine."

But as still Constance said nothing, this mention of supper reminded Leslie that it was time to leave.

The moment he was gone, she exclaimed, "I cannot conceive marrying a person you did not like, because he or she was rich; it seems such desperate folly to me, what *could* wealth do for one with an odious husband?"

"A great deal more than you think," said her uncle, "it serves to put a good deal of comfort, and even pleasure, between your dislike and his short-comings; it is a very wrong and desperate risk as you say, but when you are some ten years older, Constance, you will understand that money and established position avail more than young theorists will often allow."

A sigh, and a long pause, and then she got up and drawing a footstool to the side of the sofa, sat down and put her hand in his, saying with a low voice,—

"Uncle, I so dread being ten years older; isn't it wrong? but I *do*. Do you know I sometimes quite loath the thoughts of what I shall be if I live to be thirty-three,— a grim, grievous-looking creature, without the hopefulness of a young woman, or the calmness and dignity of an old one."

"But, my child, if you are a happy wife, you will be much gayer and lighter-hearted than you are now."

"I *never* shall be; don't talk as if I should, please;" she said, grasping his hand tightly, as if in pain, "but tell me something happy about old maids."

He had known sorrow like hers, had known what it was sweeter to remember though lost, than to banish from the heart, by means of a less precious gain; and so he indulged her mood, and, whatever he secretly thought, assumed that her fate was a single life: in depicting this he drew all the charms of eloquence around the ideal of a lonely-hearted woman; but sudden gloom had fallen on the mind of his hearer, and she listened with respectful incredulity. What could he tell her of the happiness of maiden life that equalled the bliss she had just before been thinking of "lots of love," though there was "little money?" When he spoke of the comfort in store for her, in being the tried friend and counsellor of many a younger heart, she said, almost pettishly, "Ah, yes! I shall have so little joy of my own,—so little real interest, that every one will think I have nothing to attend to but theirs, nothing to do but to hear of all their raptures, and soothe their softer griefs;"—and again when he spoke of the advantages of a ripe intellect at an age when lighter blessings are willingly resigned, her sad imagination subjoined to his description a vivid outline of herself, as a strong featured, sensible woman of fifty, with a positive voice, and determined tread, far past all the engaging prettinesses of womanly life, and entering upon old age with a growing attention to personal comfort; a hateful picture she made it; but ashamed of the fractiousness she felt, she ended by saying, "Dear uncle, you certainly do your best for poor spinsters; but you will surely grant that the world's voice, which you often tell me to respect, decides loudly in favour of married women, as being both happier and more amiable than old maids generally are? Only see for proof of this how *any* newly-married people are congratulated!"

"Not quite a fair test, though, if you think how little the world *can* know of feelings that often neutralise facts. Besides, you must remember, this new accession of happiness is celebrated in human society, like the goodness of the penitent with much clamour of sympathy, real or feigned, while no one thinks of congratulating another upon a given day for having a happy disposition, a well furnished mind, and thoroughly disciplined soul, because of the continual flow of calm happiness which such possessions generally afford. You see happiness of circumstance can be, and therefore is, signalized, but natural happiness of disposition is rarely much noticed, because those who have it are apt to suppose that all others have it too, as a matter of course, and to those who are without it, it is hardly conceivable. Oh, if there was one day in the life of an unmarried woman when she was to be congratulated on all the miseries she had escaped, and all the comfort and independence she had enjoyed, what an occasion of heartfelt felicitations it would be! Trust me, Constance, if you estimate your prospects of happiness by the views of other people, you miserably fall short of the accuracy of truth.

"Again, your present idea of a heart sufficiently subdued and mortified for unselfish joy in the joy of others, comes to you with an unwarrantable belief that with this fitness for sympathy, no bliss for yourself, on your own grounds, is possible; in fact, you think your happiness will be altogether *reflected*, and pain and trouble your only real possession. It is this fallacy, dimly working in the mind, that so often makes book delineations of unselfish people so peculiarly discouraging and distasteful: the sort of virtue some people descant upon is enough to break the heart of an angel. Dis-

miss such a fallacy from your mind;—the interests of your *own* life, the exertion of your own good qualities, your own joy in thinking and loving, these are not borrowed from sympathy, but by balancing its toils they will greatly increase it; and making yourself happy *thus*, you will help to make others happy also;—what's this on my hand? I thought I should have only put you to sleep with my harangue, which has tired me, if not you;—prythee ring, and suppose we get old Bridget, when she brings the tray, to give us her views of spinsterhood."

A sudden excuse for laughing was a good cure for the silent drop, drop, drop of those hot tears which no force of reason could check. Uncle Graham had never seen Basil, or he would not have got away into such high and dry abstractions, Constance thought. But as she rose to ring the bell, he put his arm round her, and said in tones of deep feeling, "My child, I have not spoken of the *only* happiness that can compensate for the loss of human love, because I *know* you take the right way to find it, and because I would not bring that sacred joy into comparison with any that can be described by language; but trust the report of one whom Heaven has comforted, no words can tell to a fellow-creature the sweetness of that peace which comes with perfect surrender to the will of God: it passes *all* understanding; if you cannot feel it yet, believe in it none the less—*that* peace will surely be yours."

They were both silent, and from the heart of each went up a wordless prayer; for the room was still only lit by a moon that poured its full lustre upon the verandah outside; and the flickering shadows of the rose-tree branches, falling on the carpet within, were the only things that moved.—"And Constance," said

her uncle after a pause, and as if only going on in words with what had been continuous in his thoughts, "if you value my advice, you will not determine to give yourself up to the memory of a sad affection; if it *can* be replaced by another, do not withstand the change, nor measure future prospects of happiness by the old standard; — and do not wait for perfection if a good man loves you, and you — well, well, don't be vexed; we will not speak of it again. I should hardly advise a man differently; but a woman lives so much more alone with her own heart,— she is rash, and possibly a little too brave, who refuses to fill the blank.— Ah, there's Bridget come of her own accord to fill up the blank of the supper-table."

CHAP. LII.

"Is it so helpful to thee? Canst thou take
The mimic up, nor, for the true thing's sake,
Put gently by such efforts at a beam?
Is the remainder of the way so long
Thou need'st the little solace, thou the strong?"

R. BROWNING.

"Dr. Ekebom, dean of the theological faculty of Gottenberg, said that the doctrine of Swedenborg was 'in the highest degree heretical, and on points the most tender to every Christian Socinian.' Yet he stated further that he did not know Assessor Swedenborg's religious system, and should take no pains to come at the knowledge of it,—as for his works, he did not possess them, and had neither read nor seen them."—J. J. GARTH WILKINSON'S *Life of Swedenborg.*

ABOUT a week later, when Mr. Graham Felton was so far recovered as to be able again to walk, he and Constance and Mr. Leslie spent a happy day together in a sheltered wood, botanising and sketching and talking, till the afternoon was far advanced; and they all returned to Leslie's lodgings for dinner. It was a very pleasant evening to Constance, and she had never found Mr. Leslie so agreeable; he looked radiantly happy, no doubt it delighted him to see his friend again in health.

When they got home it was bed-time, but she felt restless, and disinclined for her own society; she stayed up chatting with her uncle as long as she could,—put away his books with a fitful, abstracted sort of industry;—then she fancied the flower-glasses looked untidy, and that she must at once rearrange them, which

she did talking gaily of all kinds of trifling matters; and even when her uncle warned her that it grew late, she stopped to tell him a long story of something that had happened during her last visit to the Podmores;—and then, struck with her inconsiderateness, she hurried upstairs; but kept old Bridget some time longer, when she brought up hot water, and when at last she was dismissed, turned with unusual reluctance to solitary musings, for she had a vague fear of self-accusing thoughts; and being "single and alone with omnipresency," could no longer be deaf to the suggestion of an anxious conscience. What was it? She could not distinctly answer; in truth, she had no very clear notion just then of what she felt, or wished, or believed with regard to Mr. Leslie,—and that was a disturbing state of mind to say the least. She called herself *very* frivolous, and hated herself for thinking at all about him; and the next minute thought, "How nicely he was talking to uncle to-day; really *for him* quite worth hearing!" Then again she would forbid all recollection of his looks and manners, and while trying to avoid it, caught herself in a calculation as to when it would be likely that her uncle would ask him to dinner.

She did not blame herself without cause,—all this was the agitation of vanity; the utmost that she felt towards him was a sort of gratitude for having restored to her heart a little self-complacency; such love as his, though as yet she only called it liking, could not fail to do this, it was so simply expressed,—so free from all the tormenting variations which had broken her peace in the happiest times with Basil; but still she was only in danger of being in love with the idea of Leslie's love for her; he could never have won hers for himself, except through the mediation of vanity.

She utterly charmed him, but perhaps because his mind was not able to distinguish real qualities from representative appearances of character, certainly he did not understand her character, for her gentleness led him to think her opinions ductile, and her affection quite within reach. It was fortunate for both of them that the discord which existed between their really uncongenial minds was clearly sounded.

On the following Sunday Leslie was, as usual, spending the afternoon with his friend; there was a funeral coming up to the little church they had just left, when they reached Mr. Felton's house, and for some minutes they all three stood at the window, watching the long procession of numerous followers, which is customary in Wales, wind slowly up the hill.

Mr. Felton made some remark upon the ever-felt *novelty* of our sensations when death is brought close to us.

"I suppose," said Constance, "it is from the intense curiosity which we always feel about dying. Do you remember that fine passage of Irving's, where he speaks of 'the existence no human faculty could fix a thought upon;'* that is just it. We *cannot* imagine the state of the dead, and yet we keep on trying to do so."

* "How it fares with them, whether they merge at once into another country, by what compass or map they steer, or whether they were lost in that gulf and abyss of being for evermore, no man for thousands and thousands of years had the shadow of an imagination. It was very mysterious; each man as he shuffled off his mortal coil left us his slough, but nothing of himself. His reason, his feeling, his society, his love, all went with him; here with us was left all of him that we were wont to see and touch and handle. How he could exist apart from these, the helps and instruments of being, was all a phantasm and a dream. The existence no human faculty could fix a thought on." — EDWARD IRVING'S *Orations.*

"I do not recall the passage, my dear, you must show it me; I have most of his works I believe."

"Washington Irving?" asked Leslie.

"Oh, no; Edward Irving, the preacher. Do you know his *orations?*"

"No, indeed; and I must confess that I have not much wish to make acquaintance with them. I cannot conceive what good one could get from the writings of a fanatic like Irving; there are surely good books enough written by sound, orthodox men—really, I beg your pardon, Miss Felton, for differing so decidedly from you, but such reading appears to me *dangerous.*"

Constance looked at her uncle as much as to say "do answer him," and her uncle's reply was a question.

"Did you not read that little book of Mr. ——'s on the nervous system with great interest?"

"Indeed, sir, I did; the writer struck out some very curious and original ideas, and his suggestions here and there were most valuable."

"And yet you knew he was a quack, and had been at one time under restraint from partial derangement?"

"Yes; and of course made allowance accordingly. Ah, I see your drift; but surely there is a great difference between unsoundness of opinion in scientific and in religious matters; science admits of so much further development, which is often advanced by hypothesis, but what we receive as a divine revelation of truth, admits of none."

"In the application of such truth to the wants of our own spirits, I find large scope for hypothesis; I see that much, very much, of Christian religion is left unruled, and has to be self-adjusted, so to speak."

"That I do not deny," said Leslie, in a dissatisfied tone.

"But you do not see what that has to do with reading unorthodox books?"

"Not exactly."

"No. I followed my own thoughts underground too rapidly to be quite consequent in my words; well, it is just because I see that truth *must* be modified, in some degree, by the habits of the mind which receives it, that it seems to me so important to learn, as far as we can, how it stands in any other thoughtful mind."

"I quite agree with you, sir, there; but orthodox people *think*, I suppose, as much as those who reject sound doctrine; and whatever you like to do yourself, you would not, I presume, advise a young person to study the work of Unitarians for the sake of seeing how truth stood in *their* minds."

He spoke with all the earnestness of one who had been brought up in the straitest sect of exclusionists; and, in fact, until friendship and intellectual interests had drawn him towards Mr. Graham Felton, he had never doubted that dissenters of every sort were in the high road to perdition, and wholly condemnable, irrespective of moral character or educational bias. The influence of his friend had somewhat enlarged his views, but a positive, dogmatizing turn of mind would always make him prone to intolerance. Aware of this, Mr. Felton was careful not to arouse obstinacy by eager argument, and having said, in answer to the last remark, "much would depend on the disposition of the young person who asked my advice," he would fain have avoided further discussion; but Constance, not perceiving this, took advantage of the pause to say how grateful she felt for much that she had read of Channing's works, how glad she had been when her uncle wrote to

her father and begged that she might be allowed to read them.

Leslie was horrified, and expressed his amazement that any sincere *Christian* could take pleasure in the teaching of one who denied the main doctrine of Christian faith; and though really sorry to contradict Miss Felton, owned that *he* believed *no one* could fail to imbibe poison from such works; the wiser and the more eloquent they were, the worse would be their effects.

"Do you think the same of heathen writers, Leslie?"

"No; and I think the cry raised by some well-meaning people against the classics being placed in the hands of a young boy, is very absurd; but the errors of a heathen writer are too gross to affect our more enlightened minds; and, besides their appeal being generally to sympathies which we cannot share, in many of them there was no knowledge, and therefore no antipathy, to Christian doctrines."

"As to your first reason," replied his friend, "a believer who has a well-grounded faith in the divinity and atonement of Christ is as little likely to accept the disproving arguments of a Unitarian as the many gods of the polytheist, and if we are not strong enough to withstand such arguments we can hardly call ourselves true believers. Did you ever read anything of Channing's?"

"Never. I only spoke of what any Unitarian writer must be."

"If I do not greatly mistake, you would find from end to end of *his* writings no sign of antipathy to anything but sin. It is true he expresses strongly his variance from our belief; his dread of it in some respects, where he has evidently a very imperfect knowledge of its working; especially reprobating its assertion

of spiritual helplessness, on which I am inclined to think we *do* lay too much stress. I must find you a passage where he speaks of this most forcibly, showing how it may relax moral energy; and from his views on this point, though an exaggeration of our truth, every one of us might wisely take a warning; still I should be careful to whom I introduced such a writer; for all strong food a healthy digestion is needed."

Leslie did not speak; his eye was upon Constance, who had moved away to the book-case in search of the passage* to which her uncle referred; and seeing her arm raised to a high shelf, he was beside her in a moment, and dusting the volume he had taken down before he let her touch it; so employed he suffered Mr. Felton's to pass uncontested, and gave but a divided attention to his words, as he went on saying,—"There is more virulence of feeling against dissent in numbers of writings by churchmen than I can find towards *them* in the works of many a heretical giant; and that

* "I find almost universally in men a scepticism as to their moral power. I find almost all disposed to magnify the power of passion and temptation, to think themselves creatures of circumstances, to look upon great moral progress as an impossibility, to shield themselves from remorse under their supposed weakness. I have seldom, perhaps never, met a human being who seemed to me conscious of what was in him. I never saw a man proud of his moral force, or boasting of having put it forth in resistance of temptation and in striving for universal virtue. I have sometimes been almost inclined to wish that I could see this pride; for men are proud only of that to which they attach importance, and I have wanted some proof that any look on moral energy as the true dignity of the soul." Farther on, in the same letter, he adds, "I believe in man's dependence on God's influence, and *direct* influence, and this is *all* my hope; but man's dependence is that of a *moral responsible* being, and must not be confounded with that of passive matter. It is only by using the powers we have that we can gain new aids from heaven; and these aids will be made effectual only by our own faithful use of them."—*Memoir of W. E. Channing*, vol. ii. p. 134.

virulence I think *you* will allow is a poison even more contagious than misbelief, and certainly it is as strongly denounced in Scripture."

Finding himself called upon for a reply, and not quite clear what had been said, Leslie muttered something rather vague about the danger of latitudinarian views, and the evil fruits they are seen to produce in dissenting bodies.

"You dread latitudinarian views, so do I; but I will tell you what seems to me more latitudinarian than any other,—the careless security of soul which often goes with rigidly orthodox *opinions;* for in presumption there is a wide field for sin; and against *that* in any shape it is more essential for us to fight, than against error, which may right itself in time, or be neutralised by opposite errors, each holding in combination its peculiar element of truth. Coleridge says," he continued, now thoroughly warm on the subject, and unobservant of Leslie's tired half-attention, and of the book that Constance held open at the table beside him, "Coleridge says that many a truth lies bedridden in the human mind; truly it does, and under the influence of the soporifics of an unquestioning, *thoughtless* orthodoxy it is very hardly roused to action; is it not better that it should be roused at any rate, even by thieves at the door, or a false cry of alarm where no danger is? To feel the force of any truth we must first know what strength there is in its opposite error, and unless intellectual or bodily weakness forbids the attempt, I do not myself see how that mind can be other than feeble or cowardly — no offence, my dear fellow, to you! — which has studiously avoided any examination of the weapons of an antagonist. Besides, is any human mind entirely free from error? If you would escape all contact with

that, you must only read the Bible, and even that is appealed to for confirmation of almost every religious error one can hear of."

"Nay, sir, we have some safeguard from error in our creed."

"And can you for a minute believe that the profession of such or such a creed ensures a true and lively faith? Give but an unequal preponderance to one or two articles of that creed, and you will have error enough for nearly all the mischief you can fear from a *false* creed. You refer me to the conduct of dissenting bodies for a proof of the evil effects of false doctrine,—pardon me if I refuse such a test. We could not stand it if applied to the Established Church, or rather, we *would* not; we should say: moral iniquity has come in, and from pure principles extracts excuse or palliation of corrupt practice, the life may be bad while the faith is sound (and though I deny this, for a sound faith must be a lively one, and prove its vitality by works, according to my notions,) yet the plea which we think valid for explaining the discrepancy between faith and practice in our own case, as churchmen, we must in common fairness allow to the inconsistencies of dissenters. See, Conny, what a loquacious old fellow I am getting; poor Leslie has been ready to go this half-hour I daresay; come, I know I have wearied you out, for you have feared to prolong the discussion by answering: if you do not object we will have coffee now, and then sally out again as far as the half-way tree; I want you to prescribe for little Davy's cough, and Constance must come too, and put on the blister which I think you will recommend."

CHAP. LIII.

"The first was living fire, the next a thrill!
The weary heart can never more be stirred;
All's for the best! The fever and the flame,
The pulse that was a pang, the glance a word,
The tone that shot like lightning through the frame,
Can shatter us no more,—the rest is but a name."

The Modern Orlando.

THE following Wednesday Mr. Graham Felton had friends to dinner; but his hospitalities were so simple, and his mode of entertainment so inartificial, that there was nothing to alarm his shy niece in taking the head of the table, with the clergyman of the parish on one side of her, and Leslie on the other; the clergyman's good-humoured wife and a gentleman farmer were the only other guests; this last Mr. Felton had met at John Leslie's in passing by with Constance for their afternoon walk, they joined parties, and returned altogether to dinner, reaching home but a short time before Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd were announced. Thus it happened that Leslie and Constance were walking chiefly with each other, while the young squire kept up a respectful conversation with her uncle a little way before them; and it was only from his turning back to ask her a question towards the end of their ramble, that she was saved from hearing what would have made her cheeks even more flushed than they were when she got in. The trifling inquiry was most opportune; and

when they sat down to dinner she looked so serene, that Leslie doubted if she had understood, or even heard, something that he had hazarded by way of preliminary.

There was no lack of conversation. Constance listened to Mr. Lloyd, who, having got upon a rich vein of anecdotes about Welsh superstitions, secured her pleased attention nearly all dinner-time, while his full and rather loud voice prevented her from hearing what was being talked of by the others; but just as the cloth was being removed, she caught a sentence of Leslie's which made her take advantage of the break to hear what he said. He was speaking to Mrs. Lloyd.

"A very devout man in his way, I believe, but, as you say, quite daft on some points; when I was at his bedside the other day, I found a book of Jacob Behmen's, the mad cobbler, open beside him, and his spectacles on; 'but, Owen,' I said, 'you don't read *that* book, I hope, for instruction?' and what do you think was the answer? 'I thank the Lord who sent it to me.'"

"Singular!" ejaculated Mrs. Lloyd.

"And then," continued Leslie, "he went on at such a rate, declaring that this blessed teacher had brought him light and love, and I don't know what beside. I am afraid he thought me a sad scoffer for telling him it was a tissue of nonsense, written by a crazy man."

"Mr. Leslie!" exclaimed Constance, and then checking her tone of angry surprise, "did you ever read one of Behmen's books?"

"I have, indeed, and such a farrago of wild stuff I should have thought it impossible to read, but for the sake of a friend, dead now, poor fellow! who used to assure me that he got very valuable ideas out of it; in such unintelligible rant *he* could have found whatever he fancied, I dare say."

"I often read in Behmen, in parts of his writings which my uncle selects, and read with great interest, and, I hope, some profit," replied Constance gravely.

Leslie stared and said, "But can you make out his meaning?"

"Wherever it is important, I try; and, I think I do, partly."

"And all his mystical talk about '*forms to nature*' and the *influence of the constellations?*"

"No; I pass that over."

Leslie laughed—a rude ignorant laugh, she thought; but he would have left the subject as one on which they differed, had not Mr. Lloyd seriously begged her to remember that a fanatic like Behmen was not likely to have been commissioned to convey to the world any revelation of truth not already given to the Church; and that in three centuries which had intervened between his life and the present time, there had been time enough to test his doctrines, and yet no church had accepted them; "and, my dear young lady," he added, somewhat lowering his voice, "permit me to quote to you what the good Bishop Horne said to a friend once, as much an admirer of old Jacob as yourself: 'If,' he said, 'you desire to learn the knowledge of Divine mysteries for your edification and comfort in this vale of misery, there are ways and means, though the *well is deep*, by which, through God's blessing on your industry, much *living* water may be drawn out of it, and that without letting down into it the vessel of Jacob Behmen.'"*

Constance listened with suppressed impatience, and then looked wistfully at her uncle, hoping that he would

* Horne's Letters.

take up the gauntlet; but he was silent, paring an apple with a look of abstraction, and she, feeling quite unequal to an argument with the clergyman beside her, and cross with Leslie for his flippant tone of contempt, only said, "Bishop Horne did not, perhaps, understand what kind of knowledge his friend was seeking for in Behmen," and then eager to avoid a reply, she bowed to Mrs. Lloyd and they left the room together.

At tea-time Leslie gave himself the position of a privileged person, but was more assiduous than successful in his attempts to please. The evening seemed long to her; she was wishing so much to be alone to compose the disturbance of her own mind.

As soon as their guests were gone, she said to Mr. Felton, "Oh, uncle, why did you not help me about dear old Behmen? You seemed to consent to what they said by your silence."

"So I did in a measure."

"And yet *you* so enjoy reading him, and liked me to do so too?"

"Ay; but then you and I are in some degree exceptions; maybe we are a kind of cat in our mental vision, and can see our way in what seems darkness to minds of a different make. It is no use trying to force upon other eyes the perspectives of one's own point of view; *from* Mr. Lloyd's what he said was perfectly true, from mine false. I have learned to leave people their own notions of heresy and fanaticism undisputed; no one ever persuades a mind totally unlike his own to adopt his own opinions; they are no doubt providentially diversified. If I was on the same plane of thought as Lloyd and Leslie, I should be ready to inflict my creed upon every one else; as it is, I do but hold my own in peace. Only fancy what a storm we should have raised,

if I had told them that Swedenborg's works stood on my shelves also, equally prized for the grains of precious truth which are embedded in preposterous error."

"But, dear uncle, it is *so* exasperating to hear a writer who has Behmen's depths of holiness, dubbed a crazy fanatic, and dismissed from service just because those who so judge him, have not compass of mind for the separation of his divinely-given truths from the human weakness that received them."

"My dear child, the more we know of the highest truths, the less this exasperates; for, you see, this is only pride in disguise; we cannot bear other people to refuse respect where we give homage. I must remind you of a saying of Behmen's: 'We should watchfully take heed of pride for the Devil flieth into it, and of anger for that is the Devil's sword, wherewith he committeth all murthers.' Come, you will murder my night's rest if you go on talking now,—it is long past prayer-time."

Constance was glad to hasten upstairs that night; and drawing back the window curtains, she stood looking up at the stars, motionless from intense thought; hardly a pulse seemed to move, so entirely was she engaged by a spiritual transaction, and it was a solemn one. Her whole being was under arrest, while conscience questioned with the terrible plainness of supreme authority, "Have you been false to yourself? false to another? Have you led one whom you could never truly love to believe his love would be acceptable?" The answer would have convulsed a weaker frame with tearful agitation, hers was a silent agony of shame and regret; she trembled, seeing the depth of misery towards which she might be gently drawn on; she grieved for the grief which to-day she knew she must inflict as soon as she could; she repented of her own want of

caution; and was stung with self-contempt because she perceived that she liked John Leslie enough to be pleased with his love, even when she was most certain that she *could* not return it in any measure worth his having.

"Yes," she said to herself, "I am convicted of treachery towards him and myself, and towards the past; this paltry state of feeling shall have an end, I *must* open his eyes to the truth before he can speak more clearly."

She pondered upon every recent word and look while she was folding up her evening dress; and in consulting how the penance she intended could be performed with least pain to him, she fell asleep.

Perhaps she deserved less blame than she was inclined to give herself: her position was difficult in its perfect ease of intimacy, and from preoccupation of heart she had slipped into pleasant familiarity before she had any notion of the consequences to which it might lead. Neither was her faint feeling for Leslie at all unnatural. Love is so exquisitely sweet, that we find the noblest hearts will sometimes stoop to miserable representations of it, and to try to love though the mind refuse its allegiance, rather than forego altogether the bliss of loving.

CHAP. LIV.

"An iron tongue to summon away,
And a rope of sand to hold me back,
Are the call to go, and the will to stay—
Clamorous Duty, and still Delay."

FENELON'S *Little Abbey of Carunnal.*

"Oh, it is darkness to lose love!—howe'er
We little prized the fond heart—fond no more.
The bird, dark wing'd on earth, looks white in air!
Unrecognised are angels till they soar!
And few so rich they may not well beware
Of lightly losing the heart's golden ore!
Yet, hast thou love too poor for thy possessing,
Loose it, like friends to death, with kiss and blessing."

N. P. WILLIS.

LESLIE called soon after breakfast the next morning, he had left his stick behind him the day before. Mr. Felton was gone out; still he would come in for a few minutes, and Bridget, grinning complacently, showed him into the room where Constance sat at work. The sound of his voice hurried her breath, for the difficulty of giving any pointed intimation that should reach its mark, while alone with him, was to her almost insurmountable; yet she *must* attempt it. She wanted to speak to only one part of his heart, but how prevent the rest of it from hearing, and being wounded? A few deep, low-voiced words would not do: for that would fix attention on her embarrassment, and increase his discomposure; and alone with the person you wish to

affect, it is all but impossible to adopt that easy lightness of manner which allows a significant word to escape you with the air of chance; and he was looking so happy and full of kind affection that it was wretched to give him pain.

However, when they had both remarked on the weather, and on the new acquaintances of yesterday, the silence of the young squire, and the zeal and good sense of Mr. Lloyd; when Leslie had asked if Mr. Felton had been overtired by his walk, and Constance had torn a spill into twenty fragments, she said rather abruptly, with all the indifference she could assume, "I am going away next week."

"Going! — you speak of it very coolly,— I had hoped —"

"Yes; I have made a long and happy visit here, and I shall be very sorry to leave my uncle; but I am longing to get home again now."

He looked at her with sharpened perception, and saw that she meant just what she said — saw that she would have been detained by any *unavowed* reluctance, but that there was none strong enough to oppose a contrary resolution.

"I had hoped," he said, slightly hesitating, "that you were becoming attached to our Welsh solitudes, and might be induced to stay some time longer."

"I would rather be settled again at home."

"Then I have been very nearly making a terrible mistake," broke from Leslie in his honest dismay.

"That is just my case," she replied, answering his thoughts, and speaking with conciliatory gentleness — "I only found it out just in time."

When two people have long had close intercourse with each other, their mutual understanding is sur-

prising, and seems at times quite independent of words. Leslie got up, and moving hastily to the door, muttered that he must "be off now." Constance rose too, and did not stop his going. "Good-bye," she said, with kindly accent. Had she at all loved him, as he loved her, even this little word had been then impossible. She felt that she had broken the pleasant tie of fellowship, and given sorrow and disappointment to an honest heart, but she believed she had done right, and in this took comfort. The two were alike in simplicity, but his was the result of nature, hers of high cultivation.

In order to gain her uncle's consent to her return home next week, Constance had been obliged to give him some faint inkling of what had passed; she fancied he looked a little disappointed; perhaps it was a fancy; but what he thought of the matter did not transpire. She was glad that her mother knew nothing about Mr. Leslie, and could not step out to call on Miss Tennent, in order to comment upon their mutual *rapports*,— and her heart misgave her too that he would have been much more in her father's way than Mr. Podmore, or even Mr. Hyde; for *his* many accomplishments, and extensive range of thought, had sometimes made Mr. Felton feel uneasily behindhand when in his society; and though such an opinion had never passed his lips, she was sure that her father had thought Mr. Hyde rather too much of a fine gentleman.

It was needless to consider now who would like Mr. Leslie; she liked him very much, but knew that she could *never* love him with the entire affection which she thought indispensable: she was always making exceptions in her own heart, while she praised his character,— always wishing some little point of opinion or manner different from what it was —(trifles as they were on the surface, they must have gone deep into his

nature to have caused such strong repugnance)—often annoyed by what he said, when she could hardly account for her annoyance;—and at the same time she found him, for the most part, an agreeable associate, and delighted in his affection for her uncle. Her ideal remembrance of Basil dwarfed every one else whom she brought into comparison with it; and if at one moment she asked herself whether she could possibly find happiness in being loved by Leslie, she answered herself in the next by the poet's question,

> "Is it well, * * * having known *thee*, to decline
> On a range of lower feelings and a narrower heart than thine?"

Still this narrower heart *had* made an impression on hers, and the decision which had been made wisely with reference to the peace of future years, cost her some sorrow now.

Though she had taken pains to invent some method of telling Mr. Leslie that his suit would be in vain, and though she really wished not to see him often before she went home, yet a traitor within the camp cried out plaintively, as day after day had its sunset without his tall shadow crossing through its light up to her uncle's door; and, if he came earlier in the day, when he knew he could see Mr. Felton alone, it was like missing the chord at the end of a piece of music, when he left the house without just looking in to the drawing-room for a pleasant little chat with her.

Two days before she left Wales he came again as usual, and spent the evening with them. As long as they were together with a third person, and conversation could be at all general, she exerted all the liveliness of her wit, and kept a breeze of good-humoured merriment stirring, but this sunk when her uncle was

called away for a few minutes, and she was left alone with Leslie,—sunk to pathos and something like tears, when she thanked him earnestly for all his kindness during her uncle's illness, he answered with gloomy reserve; for when she could give him nothing but thanks, nothing but mere gratitude, it was painful to him to hear her speak of obligations.

"Is there any prospect of your coming back here before long?" he asked, when Mr. Felton returned.

"I fear not; it is such a long way from my home, that I must not think of it for some time; but my uncle will not be alone all the winter, I have devised a charming plan for him,—a very nice sensible cousin of mine is to come and spend part of December here; and she is so merry that she will do him more good than I ever could."

It happened that Harriet Payne was now at Bangor with the Lycetts; and having been a pet and a plaything of Mr. Graham Felton's when she was a little child, during one of his few visits to Ashenholt, he readily agreed to the scheme Constance had laid out, that she should spend part of her holidays at Llanvair, and then come on to Ashenholt with him for the rest of the time, before she rejoined her pupils in London.

When Constance proposed this, she was guilty for the first time in her life of a stratagem.

She took leave of Mr. Leslie that evening, not thinking it the last good-bye; supposing that of course he would come to the little village inn where she had to meet the coach; for she heard him ask her uncle what o'clock she would start; but in this she was mistaken; Leslie had his share of pride; and besides he thought she would prefer being alone with her uncle to the last minute; in theory she would, but she often turned her head towards the cottage of his friend.

Had it not been for the hope of seeing her uncle in January, this parting would have been very sad to Constance. Convinced from what she had seen of Leslie, that his was not a nature to suffer long from disappointment, she would fain have had him retain an interest in her welfare — a friendly feeling for life; she fancied that there might be found some half-way state, which without the warmth of love would be far from indifference, and still farther from pique; but, having once determined that she *ought* not to stay longer at Llanvair, she was glad to set off on her journey homewards.

It was a serene November day, with sunshine enough to gild a frosty mistiness, but not to disperse it from the pale blue sky, and ground just tinted with the green blades of early springing corn. Constance was alone in the coach, and her thoughts as gently gay as the aspect of the world outside; apart from the sense of fulfilled duty in leaving Llanvair, which made even her last disappointment at not seeing Leslie again almost sweet,—there was gratitude for the happy time she had enjoyed, and delight at being on the way home. In the peaceful pause of all every day concerns (which travelling for the time suspends), her equable mind floated in soft dreamy mood over the present and the future with soothing vagueness; and in that mood things now took such a shapely, hopeful position; all good that was attainable by the will seemed within her reach, if she could follow her uncle's advice, and fulfil his affectionate predictions; evil and fear and sorrow melted before her in the light of Divine Love.

She reached the place where the coach stopped in silent exultation. What cared she for Mr. Leslie's good-bye when about to meet her father — (she smiled as she thought of that passing cloud) — but when she

met him, her heart sunk: how sorrowfully contrasted were the ideal and actual then! He looked pale, and thin, and sad: the cares which she had prayed might be removed, and wished, and hoped, and believed were lessened,— while they were out of sight — stood legible in those dear, anxious features; and as soon as the greetings were over, his first question was, whether she was too tired to mind a second-class railway carriage for the rest of the journey?

Home, which at a distance had appeared so calm in its peaceful monotony, so warm with love, so far happier than any other place — even than Llanvair — was, when she reached it, darkened by ignoble vexations: for the drawing-room smoked; the two servant-maids were ill in bed, and her mother she found busy in the study, with a gathered-up forehead, dismissing a willing but impracticable charwoman who had come up to see if Mrs. Felton did not require some one to scour and brew; — while little Mary was creeping about with her face tied up for bad toothache; and had unluckily dashed her battledore through a pane of the dining-room window too late to send for the glazier before night. Her father looked aged and care-worn, but said he was as well as usual, and Constance remembered on reflexion that that was never a prosperous state when Christmas bills were in prospect; and his spirits bore those dints of daily thwartings and chagrins that baffle and meeken the man who is bound for life to bustling inferiority; his wife, meanwhile, was animated by a luxury of muddle, which gave her frequent occasion for saying to Constance: "Your poor father is so strangely indifferent to all that disturbs the household."

So she who returned expecting to enjoy a great deal, found that she was come just in time to suffer much, and to serve not a little.

CHAP. LV.

"Amore sveglia e muove e impenna l' ale
Per alto volo; ed è spesso il suo ardore
Il primo grado, onde al suo creatore,
Non ben contenta qui, l' anima sale."—MICHEL AGNOLO.

"I stand beneath the sky's pure cope,
Unburthen'd even by a hope;
And peace unspeakable, a joy,
Which hope would deaden and destroy,
Like sunshine fills the airy gulf,
Left by the vanishing of self."
COVENTRY PATMORE'S *Faithful for Ever.*

A QUIET prosecution of duty, and a peaceful state of feeling, affords little to relate of any peculiar interest: for the next two months Constance was busy, and very tolerably happy, finding herself more serviceable both to her father and mother, and more playful with her little sister, than she had ever been before.

There are quiet victories in the heart of which nothing is seen but their indirect results; Constance had gained one of these, and her songs of triumph were thanksgivings.

From Llanvair she heard exactly what she wished to hear; Harriet was eloquent in her admiration of uncle Graham, his dog, his conversation, and his friend; all but the shabby little house,—"which," she added, "as Mr. Leslie says, 'No one but your uncle could put up with.'"

"As Mr. Leslie says!" remarked Constance to herself, slowly folding up the letter with a half smile,—"if it is worth Harriet's while to quote such a profound saying as that, I wish he would say something else more impressive soon!"

That wish was not disappointed; one bleak morning early in January, Constance received a four-sheeted letter from her cousin, and a tiny note from her uncle; this was first opened.

"My dear Conny,

"I suspect that this deep machination of yours will be entirely successful; but if it is, you must not expect us for another fortnight.

"Your affectionate uncle,

"GRAHAM FELTON."

A little shiver ran through her as she read these words, and she stopped to try and account for it before she entered upon Harriet's long story of new happiness. Mr. Leslie had proposed, and she had of course accepted; she was the happiest of women, and he the most excellent of men, &c., why had Constance never told her how good, and clever, and sensible he was? *quite* above the average,—and so on with two or three underlining dashes at every word.

Poor Constance! it was all she had wished, and yet tears started; the news did not make her happy, and yet she loved Harriet; she felt intensely irritable under a load of unexplained sensations: gladness for her cousin was sincere,—satisfaction in Mr. Leslie's fulfilled hopes no less so; for she liked him enough to be able to rejoice in his joy,—but her own heart was muttering within a hundred painful thoughts, and

unless she was alone, she was obliged to silence it,— to smile, to speak lightly, even merrily: later in the day, when she was able to give it a calm hearing, she understood that besides the contrast of her cousin's success in all things, and the unfinishing fate of her own emotions, she had a latent dread of all the ejaculatory pleasure that would have to be expressed; high spirits are wanted for this sort of thing, and a little hope of joy for oneself; — then there would be all the details of a happiness of which she could never be cognizant, and she would feel even more lonely beside it; religion would support, but what could cheer her through all the exertions of sympathy? Her childish habit of versifying gave some outlet to her feelings, and the next morning, while her mother ordered dinner, she committed these lines to paper: —

"I thank her, for she touched the spring of tears,
Though with a careless hand.
O love! I thought the drift of desert years
Had choked thy grave with sand!

"Sweet love! true love! dead passion! broken spell!
How silent is the heart,
When all that once seemed indestructible
Is past, and has no part,

"No trace, no recognition, in the throng
Of present, trifling things! —
When Time has mastered grief, though grief is strong,
And weak the soul it wrings.

"Let Reason sleep! this unexpected sob
Bursts from delicious pain; —
This pulse within had ceased so long to throb,
'Tis sweet to feel again!"

It *was* sweet to indulge in a burst of tears as she finished,— touched to the quick by remembrance and

self-pity; but hearing Mrs. Felton's firm step coming along the hall, she caught up the newspaper which lay unopened on the table; shut her desk and leaned back, with the ample shield of the advertisment sheet of the *Times* before her unheeding eyes,—unheeding at first, but suddenly fastened to an entry among the deaths.

"At Syracuse, on the 26th ultimo, Basil Hyde, Esq., of Burnham, Surrey; after a few days illness."

Yes, he had died there among strangers. His wife preferred staying at home for English gaieties and flirting, as much as he preferred being quit of her companionship. Death seldom had come to any one more weary of life. Constance did not know, could not guess this; and yet after two or three days sadness had accustomed her to the idea of his death (death, which is always hard to realise, and much more so when it is merely heard of, without any confirmation of resulting events)—after she had schooled herself to believe that it was well that on earth she should never again behold him—after she had a little shaken off an oppressive pity for his wife, and got her father to write and offer their united condolences, with the brief eloquence of manly feeling—she was aware of something like gladness in knowing him to be loosed from that tie which had separated him from her love.

She might love him now, unrebuked by conscience, as much as she would; and oh! *now* might he not see the greatness of her love? And even if again with her he had loved first—if in a happier world with his Cecilia—surely he could not forget such faithful, patient love as hers?

How thankful was she now that no half-affection had cheated her into an engagement with any one less beloved than Basil! How would she have felt if now she

was in Harriet's place! How far better was it to wait a few years (and the longest life would seem but a few at last) till she could enter the world of spirits and say, "my heart has surrendered to no other human being, and I have loved, and shall love you so long as immortals can love." For by one intense feeling all uncertainties of thought were overborne: she little recked what the wise or the good had decided for or against the probabilities of recognition in a future state; for the instinct of her own heart was more convincing than their strongest arguments. Neither did she doubt of Basil's admission to life among the blest; as she had known him too intimately to mistake splenetic humour for levity, or to misinterpret the reserve of one who dreaded professions of piety, because his deep sense of its obligations made him habitually dissatisfied with his own upright but wayward conduct. She knew something of his struggles against bosom sin, not because he ever spoke of them, but because love had given her the key to a character which few could read aright; and this enabled her, through all its inconsistencies and failings, to discern the unmistakable signs of Christian faith and Christian practice.

Possibly imagination heightened her estimate of his virtues, and led her to attribute to him besides, those in which she excelled; but she was nearer the truth than many a censorious observer who would have passed a severer judgment upon him.

With such sublime hope it is not exaggeration to say that she was exulting in her lot, and was thus raised above the trials she had anticipated in connection with Harriet's engagement, and able to take a pure joy in all her excitement of happiness.

When the time came for her uncle and Harriet to

visit them, Constance was calm and again occupying herself cheerfully in the most trifling concerns which could make those about her happier or in any way better: she could even tell her uncle the whole story of her attachment, and almost persuaded him to admit, that it was most probable that she would be happier in cherishing the undisturbed impression of great love, than in trying to fill its place by a weaker and second-rate feeling. But yet he ended with the old warning.

"Constance, life may seem longer than you think, and impassioned views of anything human cannot last. Take care not to bind yourself by any rash determination under their present influence;—something is said by Solomon about a 'living dog being better than a dead lion,' and so many a man and woman has been brought at last to feel, with regard to a dead friend; fidelity to one who for tens of years *seems* extinct and wholly unconscious of such fidelity, may at last appear an exorbitant tribute of affection — even to you."

"But to me he is not dead," replied Constance with all a woman's inconsequence of thought.

"Not yet," said her uncle,—and just then Harriet joined them, she came to ask him if he had any message for Mr. Leslie, before she sealed her letter.

Was not the love of Constance out of all proportion with its object? What had Basil done to deserve it? Had he not given her infinitely more of grief than of joy; and avenged his own errors upon her with all the cruel bitterness of a heart at war with itself? Even so; but what then? He had never appeared base to her. The only fault which woman seldom pardons, and imagination fails to hide—that which Italians designate generically as *viltà*, had never marked his conduct; and she thought too humbly of herself to consider that he had wronged her by change: she had never let him

know her feelings, and certainly did not think herself worthy of an arduous wooing; why then should she blame him for finding out, as she supposed, what she felt all along—that he was much too good for her?

Basil therefore was maintained on the throne assigned to him in her meek, imaginative heart; and not having been deposed by his marriage, it was not likely that he should lose his supremacy by death,—which, to a degree, sanctifies and elevates the most trivial character.

What had he done to deserve her love? Ah! that little matters in a case like this: he had *been* all that her taste desired, a living representative of all that was excellently charming and good.

Let no one say that to be such a representative is slight merit: among all the distastes and disappointments of human society, to appear noble, and delightful, and affluent in mental resource, is to confer a priceless boon, and to win from some a fervent and lifelong gratitude; this boon may be given unconsciously, but that does not lessen its value; and Constance felt even in the darkest hours, that love for Basil had immeasurably raised her nature; and could she have chosen afresh, she would rather have had that love with all its anguish, than the smooth prosperity of many a happier woman.

Was she then unhappy ever afterwards? To ask that would be to put a hard question: with long grief behind, and probable loneliness before, how could her life be what is *generally* called happy? In one respect she was happier than many are; she was satisfied that she could not have acted differently than she had, without doing violence to her nature, and opposing *her* ideas of duty.

Nor did she think that she had "missed her destiny;" for she believed that she had been able to read the designs of Heaven, with regard to her life, more distinctly than many can, and so reading, she was able cheerfully to accept the Divine plan. How then could she fancy *her* destiny had been missed?

As time went on, each year passed more quickly, and brought her more engrossing occupation; she had the pleasure of teaching her sister all that she had acquired, with little assistance, herself; of seeing her grow into sunny faced girlhood, and, shortly after her eighteenth birthday, of rejoicing at her being a happy bride — married, as she told Constance with some emphasis, to the very first person she had "*ever* thought of,"—a curate of Mr. Croft's.

After this the elder sister was still more essential to the comfort of her parents: how unimaginable it would have been to her sixteen years back that her mother should resign the keys and all housekeeping cares to her,—that she should hear her tell people that "Conny was a far better manager than herself"—or that her father should so much confide in her judgment, as to call her into counsel whenever he had any difficulty in writing notes or settling matters with his tenants.

But such was her proud position; in their love and trust most happy, though never long forgetful of the past; never many weeks without turning the pages of her old Bible to look at a whitened heartsease which covered three triumphant verses in the twenty-fifth chapter of Isaiah:—it was the last flower Basil had gathered for her at Burnham; and many tears had fallen upon it since.

Otherwise she showed as little all that had once been the life of her life as the lake shows the submerged city in old fairy tales. If now and then a soft tone of

melancholy sounded from her inmost depths of feeling, few, if any, of her companions were sufficiently at leisure to heed it: she had time to attend to the griefs of other people, but those who had suffered less, had seldom a chance of guessing hers—and this was what she most desired, having made an estimate of human sympathy not very flattering to the human heart.

When she could be spared from home for a few weeks, her greatest enjoyment was going to see uncle Graham, who still inhabited his old cottage in Wales. Her romantic, idealizing turn of mind was unaltered; to herself she now appeared a tender spirit, full of intense thought and interesting feelings; very defective, sinful and suffering, but *not* common-place; and her uncle, a saintly man whose heroism and grandeur of mind were shrouded from the world by rare humility and independence of character: but, indeed, to common observers, neither of them offered any such appearance; she seemed a plain-featured, quiet woman, whom time had robbed of every vestige of romance; and he an eccentric elderly gentleman, fond of solitude, as much from its enabling him to wear gaiters of antique fashion, and coats of unknown date, as for the advantage of learned leisure and devout meditation.

From within and from without truths of equal certainty, but of very various nature, are perceived; it is surely well for all who have a clear conscience, that they can see their own little winding course through life in a softer light than that which falls upon it from any other eye. If it were not so, who could love life, or who remain long in charity with themselves?

THE END.

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